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## A Study of the Influence of Organizational Context on the Purpose, Structure, Operation and Impact of School Leadership Teams in Suburban Elementary Schools

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT  
ON THE PURPOSE, STRUCTURE, OPERATION AND IMPACT  
OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAMS IN SUBURBAN  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

AURORA MARIE MORRIS-CHASE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 1996

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Until very recently I have never read nor even paid much attention to the acknowledgments in books. I always felt they were too personal to have any meaning to me. However, since completing this dissertation I have new found interest in reading the acknowledgments because I realize it is the part of the book that connects the writer's experience to that of all other writers. Writing a dissertation requires that many people work toward a common goal and it tests the best of relationships. The contributions made by family, friends, m instructors and clerical staff cannot be understated.

First, I want to thank my parents, Aurora and Bill Morris, for instilling in me the value of learning. Their words of wisdom, "always get yourself a good education," and "you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it," have been the wind beneath my wings. I am eternally grateful for their unwavering love and support, regardless of the challenges I presented, and for modeling the way of a good life. A very special thanks goes to my sister, Mary Ann Morris who has always been present in times of need, always believed in me, and somehow always managed to convey that I had something valuable to contribute.

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beverages, munchies, back rubs, encouragement, good humor  
and love. This one's for you.

#### DEDICATION

For Aurora and William Morris who instilled in me the desire to learn and the value of a good education; and to Conrad, who endured forever without his Mom, that she might achieve her dream.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

This study is about organizational context and how it influenced the purpose, structure, operation and impact of two building leadership teams from two elementary schools within a suburban Chicago, Illinois school district. Included in this background section are an historical review of change, a description of the preparatory training for the building leadership teams and a brief explanation of organizational context.

#### An Historical Review of Change

American public school reform has been a critical educational issue for nearly forty years. Prompted by the launching of Russia's Sputnik in 1957, Americans have become increasingly concerned about the quality of their schools and their declining rank in world competition. These concerns launched a quest for improved performance which has transcended four decades and fostered change of a magnitude unparalleled in the history of American education. The need for change became widely evident and well documented in numerous reports such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education's, A Nation at Risk (1983); the

Carnegie Forum Task Force on Teaching's, A Nation Prepared (1986); and the National Governors' Association's, A Time for Results (1986). Though the need for change was evident and clearly delineated in these and other such reports, the process by which it was to be achieved was relatively undefined.

Limited knowledge about the change process, however, had little effect on the rate and degree of attempted change during the 1960s when American education entered an era described by Fullan (1991, p. 5) as the Adoption Era. This post-Sputnik period, represented by large scale, radical curriculum innovation and student-centered instruction, reflected a preoccupation with the number of innovations in schools; the more innovations, the better the mark of progress. Little attention was given to investigating whether the changes were appropriate to the system or producing desired outcomes (Fullan, 1991).

The mass activity of the 1960s yielded an extremely poor success rate, resulting in negative attitudes toward change and innovation. This led to the era known as Implementation Failure (Fullan, 1991, p. 5). Programs implemented during the sixties were failing in the seventies, a condition attributed to the process of implementation rather than the quality of the programs. Specifically, programs had been adopted with little concern for need, appropriateness or value as determined by those

required to implement the changes. These conditions were documented in several important publications: The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change, by Seymore Sarason and Behind the Classroom Door, by John Goodlad, which gave credibility and momentum to increase study of the change process. The implementation of change had become an issue of considerable proportion to the educational community, prompting a major study conducted between 1973 and 1975 by the Rand Corporation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977). The study examined about three hundred projects throughout the United States which had received federal seed money to develop and implement innovative educational practices. As summarized in Change in Schools (Hall & Hord, 1984) the Rand study revealed that:

1. schools change as new practices (a) are adapted to the local situation, (b) gain support of those asked to implement, and (c) become integrated into the regular operation of the organization.
2. there are three stages in the change process; the initiation phase, implementation phase and institutionalization
3. the characteristics of successfully implemented projects are (a) adaptive planning (constant planning to adapt a change to the local setting, (b) staff training to meet the needs of local school personnel, (c) the development of either locally developed materials or those that are adapted to the needs of the local school, and (d) the identification of a critical mass of innovators who would support the program and other participants.
4. outcomes of the implementation depend on the following internal factors: (a) the quality of the organizational climate, (b) motivation of the participants, (c) the implementation strategy used by local leaders, (d) the scope of the change, and (e)

the support of the principal. (Hall & Hord, 1984, pp. 38-40)

The early work of the Rand Corporation established the framework for further study and refinement of the change process and launched a trend toward greater involvement of teachers in the planning and implementation of change.

The Rand study and other change research occurring during the era of Implementation Failure positively impacted change efforts of the late 1970s and throughout much of the following decade. However, this era, dubbed Implementation Success (Fullan, 1991, p. 5), was far from a panacea. In sharp contrast to the overwhelming amount of attempted change in America's public schools, the rate and degree of successfully implemented changes remained marginal (Fullan, 1991). One explanation for this condition, according to Michael Fullan was that "Educational change is technically simple and socially complex" (1991, p. 65). By "technically simple" Fullan meant that it was relatively easy to successfully accomplish the tasks related to implementation in comparison to the people problems of change. Writing the policy, getting it approved, establishing long-range plans, selecting an adoption or program, establishing logistics for training and developing program evaluation were relatively easy technical aspects to accomplish in comparison to getting staff and community to understand, accept, apply, commit to and value the proposed changes and make them become a way of life in the school. Although these social



aspects of change have continued to challenge change agents during the 1980s and 1990s the change research of the 1970s opened the previously closed institution of education to greater involvement and participation of constituents in decision making. It was at this time that the Illinois Center for Educational Improvement Title IVc Project of the Northwest Educational Cooperative in Arlington Heights, Illinois embarked on the development of its school improvement training program, Training to Increase Student Achievement; drawing heavily on the change research as the basis of its design.

#### The Training in Brief

In the early 1980s this researcher, a consultant with the Illinois Center for Educational Improvement Title IVc Project in Arlington Heights, Illinois, was challenged to design a training intended to foster school improvement and increased student achievement. The process began with a comprehensive review of the literature in search of those variables most highly correlated with student achievement. The review revealed several areas of great importance; namely, the research on effective schools, school learning climate, expectations, and time on task. The magnitude of these topics, if addressed by trainees, had the potential to generate substantial, substantive change for their schools. The training design, therefore, needed to address this potential and educate participants in the process of change

in addition to other training content. Given the complexity of the core topics, it was likely the participants' attempts to implement these massive innovations would meet with failure if they did not understand the process of change. Consequently, while influencing the structure and design of the training itself, the change research was added to the training as an explicit topic. A primary manifestation of this influence on the training design was the creation of the building leadership team (BLT).

The purpose of Training to Increase Student Achievement (TISA) was to teach the building leadership teams about change and school improvement so they could lead improvement efforts in their respective schools. More specifically, the goal of the training was to help school practitioners implement meaningful, essential changes as opposed to change for change sake, also referred to as expedient change, or change imposed from hierarchical leaders, frequently known as enforced change (Argyris, 1970) evident during the Implementation Failure Era. Improving student learning was going to require much more than the adoption of a new program developed in a school from another part of the country, or worse yet, another country. The era of implementation failure taught change agents that the business of improving student learning was far more complex than originally thought, and would have to address the beliefs, values and behaviors of school and community

members as well as the school norms. This purpose was reflected in the Path to School Improvement illustrated in Figure 1. The teams were to use their knowledge and skills to assess improvement needs with staff, analyze student achievement data, establish improvement plans and monitor progress. Roles and responsibilities of the teams were significantly influenced by the findings of the Rand study. For example, teams were the means by which new practices such as curriculum development and instructional applications could be adapted to their school's specific situation. Since teams were an integral part of the school, they could monitor change efforts and support them through the phases of initiation, implementation and institutionalization. Staff inservice planned or delivered by the team could be tailored to the specific needs of staff and new materials could be adapted or designed with specific individuals in mind. This process of adapting or tailoring innovations to the specific needs of the school was an essential finding of the Rand study. Ownership of the process resulting from fostering change from within, increased the likelihood of institutionalization of attempted change.

The TISA team training was a six-day event spread over two weeks. Participants were required to read and analyze several hundred pages of research, participate in

## PATH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

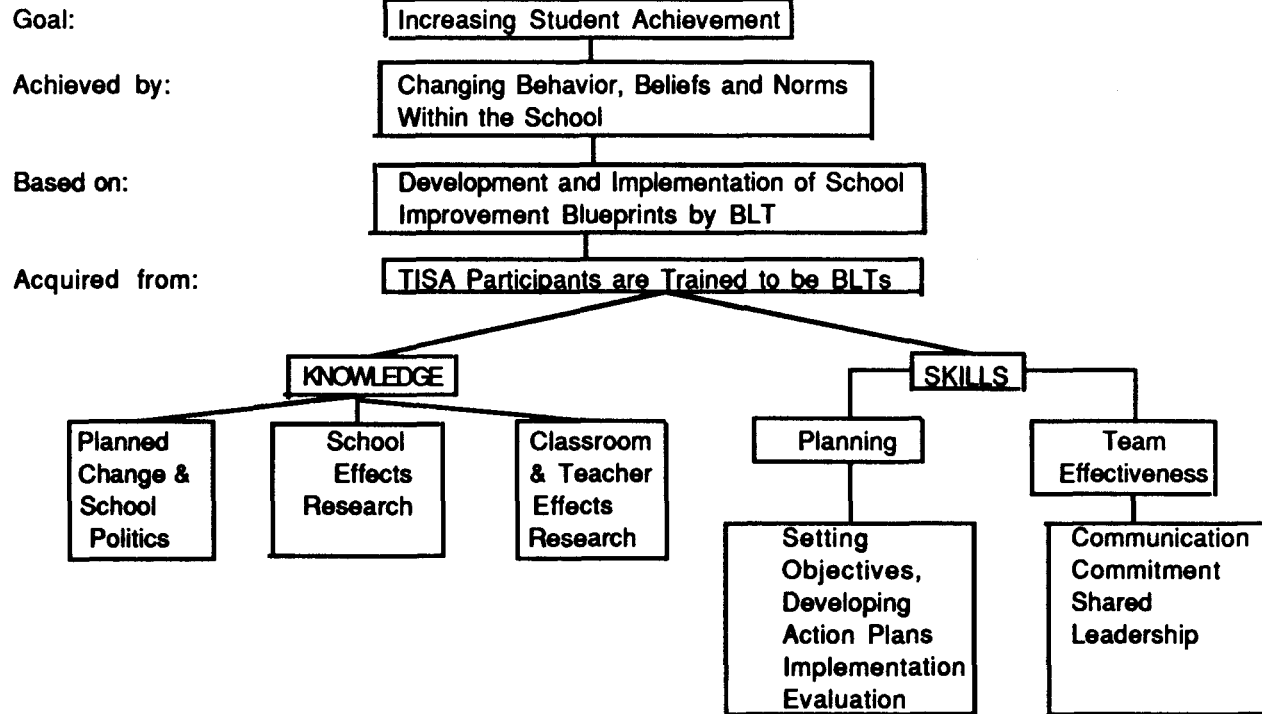


Fig 1.-- Path to School Improvement

simulated problem solving and team building activities, and apply the research directly to their school's particular situation through structured lessons. The length and design of the training created strong bonds between team members and consequently, several procedural guidelines were developed to foster the team's successful reentry to the school following the training and to ensure equal opportunity for all staff to at some point become team members. Reentries were, in nearly all cases, successful.

The Training to Increase Student Achievement was provided to several hundred individual schools in Chicago, Illinois and the surrounding suburban area and to four entire school districts between 1982 and 1986. As of 1994 all schools in the four school districts continued to use building leadership teams for the planning and implementation of school improvement. At the time of this research a follow-up study had not been conducted on schools that participated in TISA on an individual school basis.

### Organizational Context

Though the TISA program was designed to improve schools through the efforts of building leadership teams, the results differed widely from school to school; a condition that was anticipated by TISA trainers. These varied outcomes were attributed to the influence of differing school contexts. Research suggests that the extent to which classroom changes are implemented and how

long the changes last are highly susceptible to the influence of contextual conditions in the school (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). This causal relationship however, does not explain how these conditions influence change efforts.

Boyd (1992) has defined context as consisting of both ecological and cultural dimensions of the school and has suggested that these dimensions address the interrelatedness and interdependence of all facets of school life. Ecology refers to the inorganic elements of the school which, though not living, have an impact on the people of the organization. The availability of resources, the size and demographics of the school and system, and the rules and policies are examples of ecology. Culture, though widely defined and described in the literature, was defined by Boyd (1992) as the organic dimension of context, consisting of the attitudes, beliefs, norms and relationships among members of the school. Boyd (1992) suggested that the interrelatedness and interaction of the elements of culture and ecology comprise the context in which school improvement efforts are undertaken. "Existing school contextual conditions inevitably mingle with the change process to yield substantially different results from school to school" (Corbett, Dawson & Firestone, 1984, p. xiii). To understand the impact of contextual factors on change, school leaders must examine the circumstances of schooling and the meaning

given to them by all school audiences, both inside and outside of the school (Boyd, 1992).

### Purpose of the Study

How to plan and sustain meaningful change has been a growing concern to educators since the early 1960s. It is now known that the ecological and cultural aspects of school context play an important role in the success or failure of change efforts (Boyd, 1992). Though it is known that context influences the outcome of change efforts, it is not fully understood how the many elements comprising school context--values, resources, stability, willingness, relationships, etc.--interact to yield enabling or limiting effects, and particularly, how they have influenced the work of the building leadership teams. It is conceivable that, while some building leadership teams have become the cornerstone to successful and meaningful change, other teams established during the past decade, have become barriers to their own most desired outcomes. The consequence of such conditions can have devastating long-range effects on change efforts. The prediction that schools face a future of increased change (Citron, 1985) increases the need for school leaders to understand the nature of context and its influence on change efforts. This knowledge can help school and district leaders address the ecological and cultural conditions in schools that will increase the likelihood that essential changes can be implemented and institutionalized.

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze how the ecological and cultural dimensions of organizational context influenced the purpose, structure, operation and impact of two building leadership teams from two elementary schools within a suburban Chicago, Illinois school district. Even though both building leadership teams participated in the same training and preparation necessary to fulfill their roles, one team became a high impact team while the other team became a low impact team. This study focused on how organizational context influenced this result.

### Definition of Terms

Throughout this study several terms were used consistently. To foster clarity and understanding they are defined as follows:

1. building leadership team--the group, consisting of the principal and several teachers, who were given the responsibility for planning and implementing school improvement in their particular school
  - 1.1 purpose--the perceived reason leadership teams exist
  - 1.2 structure--the composition of the teams
  - 1.3 operation--the manner in which teams conduct their work and the formal and informal norms which guide their work
  - 1.4 impact--school improvement changes



2. shared leadership--involving teachers in many of the leadership functions related to school improvement previously reserved for principals.
3. context--the conditions and circumstances within which life within schools occurs.
  - 3.1 ecological--the nonhuman factors, conditions and circumstances which comprise context
  - 3.2 cultural--the human factors, conditions and relationships which comprise context.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter II contains a review of the training and related research while Chapter III examines organizational context and the related literature. The methodology and research design are described in Chapter IV followed by the presentation and analysis of data in Chapter V. Chapter VI provides a summary of the findings, a discussion of the implications, and questions for further study.

## CHAPTER II

### DESCRIPTION OF THE TRAINING AND REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze how the ecological and cultural dimensions of context influenced the purpose, structure, operation and impact of two building leadership teams (BLT) in two elementary schools in suburban Chicago, Illinois. While the primary inquiry of this study focused on contextual influence, it was examined in conjunction with the specific shared leadership structure known as the Building Leadership Team, implemented in schools for the purpose of bringing about meaningful school improvement change.

Due to the expansive scope of this study this researcher narrowed the focus for the review by considering two major areas which offer the necessary background. This chapter includes a comprehensive description of the training, the building leadership teams, and the research related to the main training components.

This chapter provides the background necessary to understand (a) the purpose, core beliefs, and intended

outcomes of the TISA program and (b) the purpose, structure, operation and anticipated impact of building leadership teams. The guiding literature and research upon which the program was developed relates to the four major training components of (a) the orientation, (b) school effects, (c) teacher effects and (d) change effects.

### The Training Program for the Building Leadership Teams

#### Purpose, Core Beliefs, and Intended Outcomes

As stated in Chapter I and illustrated in Figure 1, the purpose of the Training to Increase Student Achievement was to improve student learning through a process of school-based, planned change that addressed essential changes in behavior, beliefs and norms within the school. There are several fundamental principles that continually emerged from the literature and became guiding forces during the design of TISA and ultimately became the core beliefs of the program; they are: (a) all children can learn (Block & Anderson, 1975; Bloom, 1976), (b) schools can make a difference in whether children learn or do not learn (Edmonds, 1978), (c) change must be focused on alterable variables (Bloom, 1980), (d) the school is the most impactful unit of change (Barth, 1990), (e) change is a process not an event (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975, 1977; Fullan, 1991; Hord, et al., 1987; Miles, 1987), (f) structures play a significant part in what schools can

accomplish (Sarason, 1982), (g) articulated, desired outcomes should be the basis for guiding behavior, decisions, and organizational structures (Peters & Watterman, 1982), (h) conformity to agreed upon outcomes and diversity of means to achieving them plays an important role in successful school improvement (Peters & Watterman, 1982), (i) conflict and confrontation can be a positive force in productive change (Lippitt, 1969), and (j) meaningful organizational improvement is best achieved when everyone in a school becomes involved in and committed to the process of personal and organizational improvement (Dewar, 1980; Peters & Watterman, 1982). These ten core beliefs provided the template for the training design and the basis for all design decisions. It became important that training activities paralleled the experiences that typically occurred in schools and that the participants had an opportunity to work through their actual school issues during the training; giving them a beginning repertoire of acceptable responses to issues they would likely encounter after the training. In this regard, the training attempted to foster a strong commitment to these ten beliefs, increase participants' knowledge of the research that supported these beliefs, and develop their ability to work as an effective team, and school change/renewal agent to confront and address the issues that stood in the way of their school

experiencing its effectiveness potential. As stated in the TISA training manual, the goals were:

To increase participants' knowledge of the current research findings that most significantly correlate to student achievement.

To assist participants develop implementation processes which utilize past experience, current research and newly developed skills to determine what changes need to be made in their schools and classes and how best to make them. (Chase, 1983, p. 3)

The enormity, complexity, and difficulty of genuine school improvement required not only knowledge and skill, but a passion for improvement that would help school members courageously confront the hard times they inevitably would face as they began to peel back the well established norms and behaviors that sustained their school's level of effectiveness. In some ways the training was a type of boot camp that permitted trainees to experience simulations of real school experience so they could deal with those realities effectively when they encountered them. One such experience was the "public critique"; a role-playing type activity in which teams, having completed an assignment or task, would present their product to the whole group as they would if the group were their staff. The group then was instructed to react to the presentation in a manner typical to that which might be found in most organizations; with a combination of curiosity, anger, resistance, enthusiasm, etc. This type of experience not only helped the team produce a better plan, but also helped them build a

repertoire of appropriate responses to such concerns.

Another by-product of such activity was the strong bonding and camaraderie between team members and within the training group. This supportive, trusting atmosphere contributed to the passion trainees felt for the core beliefs and for their mission as change agents.

Another powerful element of the training was the eclectic and holistic approach to looking at school change. In contrast to many training programs, TISA was designed to expose participants to research from varied origins such as social research, industrial and corporate research, research on teaching, change, culture, staff development and effective schools. This approach tended to portray schools as multifascited and highly dynamic, with many factors influencing change all at the same time. Participants were encouraged to accept this and address these multiple needs simultaneously rather than as isolated elements that could be addressed one at a time.

The ultimate, intended outcome of TISA was to increase learning for all students to a standard that would increase their options in life. This was also referred to as the quality and equity dimensions of effective schools; the quality dimension being the level of performance required that would equal increased options in life and the equity dimension represented by the expectation that the quality standard applies to all the students who attend the

school. The enormity of this task was the basis for an equally important training outcome; the creation of an in-school structure and process that would insure the continued renewal of school improvement efforts and lead to all students learning. The building leadership teams were conceived as the means to achieve this second outcome.

### Building Leadership Teams

The decision to use a team approach to school improvement was based on the need for a structure that would (a) be able to address school improvement as a process rather than an event, (b) be accepted by the school as the primary planning vehicle for the school improvement, (c) be able to address the complexity of school improvement and, (d) over time, become the cornerstone of school renewal. For teams to be able to fulfill this rigorous structural criteria, this researcher determined that teams would need to have a clear understanding of their purpose before they even started the training. The team became such an important aspect of the TISA design that prospective participating schools were given guidelines for team selection with the hope that at the onset of training, every team would clearly understand why they were there and would have made a commitment to their purpose. Such discussion and preparation fostered team building long before training ever began and contributed to many highly focused and motivated learners. Schools unable to achieve such

pretraining conditions were counseled out of participating in the training and encouraged to continue working toward the readiness commitment.

### Purpose

The purpose of the team was to fulfill the goals of the TISA program. Student achievement was the goal of TISA and the teams were means to achieve it. Teams were to be the in-school change agents for continual renewal and school improvement; although, their role was representative and facilitative rather than directive. They were there to do the tasks too cumbersome to involve the entire staff in doing, but they were always to involve the staff in the decisions. Some of these tasks would include the review of current trends in research and emerging programs, disaggregation of student achievement data, review of exemplary programs for special student populations. This type of information would be reviewed and organized for presentation to the staff who, in turn, would collectively decide how to proceed. This defined purpose required that teams acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfill their purpose. This knowledge and skill was initially acquired during the TISA training, however, teams were expected to continue their learning and development long after the conclusion of the training. The training primarily stressed the research supporting school and organizational improvement, student learning and change. It



also provided opportunities for them to learn about group process and practiced their group skills. They learned to "map" organizational influence and practiced how to handle, omnivorous, fence sitters and resisters (Joyce & Showers, 1980). They learned long and short range planning skills and how to plan inservice they would deliver to colleagues. They learned the scope of their responsibility and when decisions had to involve the entire staff. Most importantly, they had to learn to lead while still being a member of the staff. For some, this was very energizing while for others it was nearly paralyzing and in nearly all cases it was the passionate commitment to purpose that made them persevere.

### Structure

Tailored after the Quality Circles Model (Dewar, 1980), teams were structured to be inclusive and efficient. Teams usually consisted of between five and eight members who would serve two year terms before being replaced. Members either volunteered or were asked to serve but never simply assigned. The process of team selection could vary but the constant characteristic was that it needed to be perceived by all staff to be fair.

The team was structured to have just half its members retire at one time leaving the other half to provide the continuity necessary for sustained improvement. Retirement was encouraged even though members may have wanted to serve

additional terms. The reason for this was to avoid the "in group," "out group" factioning of the staff and also to avoid sanctioning noninvolvement of staff. Schools were encouraged to expect that all staff would make their commitment to school improvement by serving on the team.

Membership needed to be balanced; representing the various perspectives of the school, such as various grade levels and special services. The principal was an ongoing member but did not necessarily serve as the group's leader.

Teams were encouraged to meet once a week, although most met more often. Stipends were offered in some schools while others provided substitutes so teams could meet during the school day.

The renewal capacity of the teams necessitated their continuous learning and development. Team members became priority participants to attend out-of-school training, state and national conferences. They were expected to remain current with issues, trends and developments in education and be prepared to share their learning with other staff through the formal and informal professional development times. Teams were also encouraged to provide some form of updating of new members. Recognizing that the full six day training could not be replicated every two years, schools were encouraged to have the previous team update the new members and to formalize that process to include requiring new members to read the background

material for TISA, learn about the operation of the team, and review its work. It was suggested that the selection and preparation of new members begin in the early spring of the year and culminate in a retreat for outgoing and incoming members after the conclusion of the school year. It was the hope of this researcher that this would become a well integrated process of the school year, valued by staff and perceived as a high level professional development opportunity. The success of this endeavor, of course, rested heavily on the experience and composition of the outgoing team.

### Operation

Operation refers to how the teams conduct their business and the formal and informal norms that guide their work. The operation and scope of responsibility of the team was intended to relate directly to their purpose, and the defined purpose was to be the driving force and motivation behind their behavior and operation.

As stated earlier, teams were expected to shoulder the responsibility of their school's improvement process for the time prescribed by their membership on the team. School improvement was the responsibility of the entire staff, the teams just provided the momentum, continuity and logistics of improvement changes, much the way individual racers contribute to the outcome of their relay team. Each does their part to carry the responsibility for a period of time,

picking up on the effort of previous runners and passing off to those who follow.

How a team operated was largely determined by the team themselves; however, there were several important operational guidelines provided during the TISA training which were intended to reduce conflict and distraction from their tasks.

One very important operational guideline the training addressed was the scope of the team's responsibility. Teams were encouraged to relate their efforts and recommendations directly to school improvement. This was often described during the training as "building bridges" for staff so they would understand how the team came to the conclusions they did and were making the recommendations they were making. Teams were taught to always have data to support their recommendations and present the data to staff directly. The scope of their responsibility could address student performance, curriculum and programs, school climate, instructional strategies, staff development and parental involvement. They were never to evaluate the performance of specific teachers or use such data as rationale for improvement suggestions. The role of the team was representative and facilitative rather than directive or administrative. They were not to fill in for the principal or conduct work of the principal.

Another guideline related to the leadership within the team. Though the team was never to conduct the work designated to the principal, they could assume leadership of the team and within the team. Observation of the teams during training revealed a variety of responses to this guideline. In some instances, principals had little difficulty sharing the leadership role with staff while others insisted on being the team leader. As expressed by principals during the training, the degree of shared leadership that a team experienced seemed to be related to certain characteristics of the principal, such as risk-taking and trust, and the degree of accountability they perceived to be expected of them. The long-term effects of shared leadership and team impact were not studied or determined. Teams learned a variety of consensus seeking and group process techniques which insured the involvement of all team members even though formal leadership of the group varied. Under no circumstance was the group leader to be the sole decision maker.

The final major operational guideline endorsed during the training related to the team's meetings. Team members were to attend all meetings which were to be held regularly and frequently. Agendas and minutes were to accompany each meeting and to be made available to nonteam staff members. Team meetings were open to any staff member who wished to attend. This fostered trust and insured the team operated

according to the guidelines. If nonteam staff wished to contribute their thinking at team meetings, they were permitted to join the discussion temporarily, share their thoughts and then resume their place as an observer of the meeting. This kept meetings from being bogged down with personal issues while insuring that all staff members felt heard.

### Anticipated Impact

The anticipated impact of building leadership teams coincided with the purpose for which the teams were created; improved student achievement. More specifically, it was expected the teams would identify and implement school improvement efforts which would address the quality and equity dimensions of effectiveness and result in a high standard of learning for all students. Teams were expected to be fully integrated into the operation of the school and over time, thought of not as a "program," but rather, the process through which the school identifies and implements improvement changes. A successful team would be referred to by all staff as "how we do business here." More specifically, successful teams would have student learning as their primary purpose, have a clearly defined structure and operational guidelines, possess the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and address problems that interfere with student learning, and plan and implement changes that lead to improved student learning. This description of an

effective team was used as the basis for a screening questionnaire for the study.

### Training Components and Related Research

TISA was an outgrowth of several years of dissemination work funded by federal Title IVc resources in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The project, Illinois Center for Educational Improvement, was established to help schools in a four county, suburban Chicago region, provide innovative solutions to critical problems. After several years of service to school districts and the implementation of hundreds of innovations, project staff began to question the impact of their efforts on the quality of education and student achievement. These concerns led to this researcher being assigned the task of compiling the research and literature related to student learning in an attempt to decipher what, if anything, made the difference in whether students learned.

The initial review of literature identified ten topics of study that showed relationship to student learning. These topics included the study of mastery learning, alterable variables, effective schools, change, staff development, school learning climate, expectations, curriculum, school organization, and time on task. These major topics comprised the research and literature foundation for the TISA program. These ten topics were then clustered into three major categories of effect on student

learning and a training orientation. The organization of content is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.--Organization of Content

Training Category	Topic of Research
Orientation	Mastery Learning Alterable Variables
School Effects	Effective Schools School Learning Climate Curriculum School Organization
Teacher Effects	Expectations Time on Task Mastery Learning Classroom Organization and Grouping Practices Classroom Management Direct Instruction Cooperative Learning Teacher Clarity
Change Effects	Change Research Staff Development

### Orientation

The orientation component of TISA established the concept that learning for all was achievable and that schools and those who work in them are responsible for realizing that goal. Research supporting that claim was conducted by Bloom (1968) and later Block and Anderson (1975). They found that by altering the variable of time 75 to 90 percent of a given student population was able to achieve the same



high level of learning typically achieved by only the top 25 percent of students. They called this new approach, mastery learning, and challenged the long-standing belief, represented in the normal curve, that only a small percentage of students would ever achieve excellence in learning. Mastery learning was a process of instruction designed for use in the regular classroom and incorporated a system of feedback/correction procedures combined with a well analyzed and organized curriculum, making it a reasonable, viable option for classroom teachers. The applicability of the approach and the significance of the results made the goal of all children learning reasonable and achievable. In a General Session address at the ASCD 1978 Annual Conference Bloom attempted to advance these ideas. He appealed to educators to formulate new views of learners which, he asserted, would result from the application of these new practices. Here Bloom made the link between the expectations teachers held for learners and the degree of learning they produced in learners. These ideas established a firm foundation of support to TISA goals and the feasibility of the goals.

Another important piece of the orientation was the research on alterable variables (Bloom, 1980). Bloom suggested that certain shifts in research methodology during the 1970s made it possible to greatly improve student

learning. Four methodological features accounting for these new research developments included: (1) the study of teaching rather than teachers, (2) causal links to learning supported by qualitative and quantitative data vs. pre-post studies, (3) experimental study guided by models and theories which embody causal links, and (4) study of alterable rather than static variables. Static variables, though having been the topic of much research and at times showing a statistically significant relationship to student learning, were relatively unchangeable. Such variables included amount of time available for learning, intelligence, summative assessment results, teachers' characteristics, and parent characteristics and status. Alterable variables however, also showed a statistically significant relationship to student learning, and in addition, were found to be highly impactful. Much could be done, for example, to alter time on task, determine cognitive entry behavior, utilize formative assessment results, improve teaching, and the home environmental process; all variables described by Bloom as alterable. This research set the stage for the school effects category.

### School Effects

In the early 1980s, when this researcher was reviewing the literature for innovations most strongly correlated to student achievement, there were four research areas related to the school effects category which

established strong links; they are: effective schools, school learning climate, curriculum, and school organization. The major message generated from the school effects research was that schools do make a difference in the learning of all students and the difference is the result of factors within the school rather than factors related to the students. This message contrasted sharply to earlier research which questioned the schools impact for some children; in particular, those of low socioeconomic status.

A major study, commissioned by Congress which sought to assess the distribution of educational resources by race, reported that despite black pupil access to school resources that were nearly equal to white, black pupil performance was substantially below white pupil performance, and the difference seemed to be caused by pupil family background (Edmonds, 1978). Similar conclusions were drawn about performance differences between affluent children and poor children. It was James Coleman who Congress commissioned to conduct the study and his findings concluded that how well students did in school had little to do with the schools themselves.

Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; . . . this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life and the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity must imply a strong

effect of schools that is independent of the child's immediate social environment, and that strong independent effect is not present in American schools. (Coleman, 1966, p. 325)

Coleman's conclusions provided little impetus for schools to tackle the enormous, emerging social challenge of educating all children. Basically, Coleman's research suggested that if children were born into poverty they would not do well in schools and that schools would not be able to educate them.

Though Coleman's (1966) data clearly substantiated wide disparities in the achievement of children from low and high socioeconomic levels, the disturbing outcome of his study was the predictive overtones that schools were unable to impact such a condition, relegating a large segment of America's youth to the life of poverty into which they were born. With the political agenda of the 1960s and 1970s aggressively challenging equity issues throughout society, Coleman's research fostered heated debate and became the springboard for the much acclaimed effective schools research.

In direct response to the Coleman Report, Ron Edmonds embarked on a major project called the "Search for Effective Schools" which sought to answer the question: "Are there schools that are instructionally effective for poor children?" This quest prompted several studies beginning with one called, "Remedy for School Failure to Equitably Deliver Basic School Skills" which measured pupil performance in the twenty elementary schools that made up

Detroit's Model Cities Neighborhood Study (Lezotte & Edmonds, 1974). Here the researchers sought to establish that instructionally effective city schools could be located and did so by analyzing the reading and math scores from Detroit's Spring 1973 Stanford Achievement Test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for 2,500 randomly sampled students of the 10,000 pupils attending the twenty schools in the Model Cities' Neighborhood Study. These students' scores were compared with citywide performance norms as a measure of school effectiveness and an effective school was defined as being at or above the city average grade equivalent in math and reading while an ineffective school was one that was below the city average (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1973).

Having tentatively established that instructionally effective city schools exist, researchers conducting the Model Cities' Neighborhood Study next examined the relationship between pupil family background and school effectiveness. Two schools, one effective and one ineffective, were chosen from the original twenty for further study. The schools were matched on the basis of eleven social indicators and despite the similarities in characteristics of the student served, they still yielded different success rates in student learning, endorsing the idea that school effects might play a more significant role in student achievement than the eleven social variables

which included economic status and minority group affiliation (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1973).

Yet another phase of the "Search for Effective Schools" project (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1973) consisted of reanalysis of the Equal Educational Opportunity Survey (EEOS) data used in the Coleman report for the purpose of determining the influence of school characteristics and student social background. An important discovery of the reanalysis was that Coleman's study failed to control for variables related to social class as was the case in the Detroit study and which, when done, yielded very different results.

For example, in their sixth-grade analysis, 11% of the variation in achievement is uniquely related to background, 5% is uniquely associated with school characteristics, and 71% is associated with the common or indistinguishable influence of school characteristics and student social background. Interestingly, when the school population was stratified according to average socio-economic status (SES) of pupils in each school "the independent role played by the student body variables was greater than that of school variables for high SES schools. In contrast, for low SES schools the school variables played a greater independent role than the student body variables. (Mayeske et al., 1972, p. 67)

The strategy of controlling social class variables became important in further studies attempting to determine school effectiveness. Several studies conducted throughout the 1970s attempted to determine the impact of school efforts on student learning independent of social class. The studies shared common features by using standardized, norm-referenced tests as the criteria for determining

effectiveness, used a system of pairing effective with ineffective schools and matching them on school criteria and student demographics, and finally, each study generated characteristics unique to the effective school (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Lezotte & Edmonds, 1974; Madden, Lawson, & Sweet, 1976; State of New York, 1974; Weber, 1971). The major conclusion of this research was the validation that, regardless of student social background, schools can and do make a difference in student learning and the schools that demonstrate this outcome share several common characteristics. Yet to be determined was whether these common characteristics were causal or correlative. Although the number and description of characteristics varied slightly from study to study, the main themes which continually emerged included (1) the principal's leadership and attention to the quality of instruction; (2) a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus; (3) an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning; (4) teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery; and (5) the use of measures of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation (Edmonds, 1982). In addition to the five characteristics described by Edmonds, Lezotte (1982) refers to the two additional characteristics of (1) opportunity to

learn and student time on task, and (2) home-school relations.

Two other major effective school studies were covered in the TISA program. From the study of several high schools in London, England, researchers attempted to determine whether some schools were more effective than others and their effects on children (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimor, & Outson, 1979). The study, recorded in a book called Fifteen Thousand Hours, identified six major characteristics. Included in their list of characteristics was (1) an emphasis on learning, (2) varied instructional strategies, (3) clearly defined rewards and consequences for behavior and academic performance, (4) conditions conducive to learning for students, (5) opportunity for student responsibility and leadership supported by multiple extra curricular activities, and (6) a positive ethos. The positive ethos was defined as a "climate of expectations and modes of behaving" (Rutter, 1979, pp. 55-56). Researchers found that positive ethos directly influenced student behavior and was created through strong leadership, high expectations, consistency and direct and immediate feedback to students.

The final major school effectiveness study reviewed during TISA training was conducted by Phi Delta Kappa. A case study method was used to gather data from eight exceptional urban schools throughout the midwest states. An



aggregation of the case study literature, coupled with analysis of research development and evaluation reports on exceptional urban elementary schools revealed factors associated with success in urban elementary schools (Phi Delta Kappa, 1980). Those factors were grouped by personnel, instructional programs, parent involvement and school environment control. Specific characteristics included (1) strong building leadership, (2) high expectations for staff and students, (3) positive role modeling from adults in the school, (4) well defined instructional outcomes and monitoring systems of pupil progress, (5) well defined, comprehensive parental involvement and, (6) safe, orderly attractive physical plant.

Other school effects research focused on school learning climate, school organization and curriculum. While the research to this point established that all children can learn what any child can learn, if we provide the appropriate teaching-learning environment in the school (Bloom, 1976), and that schools clearly make a difference in student learning (Edmonds & Lezotte, 1974), the school learning climate literature describes the environment necessary for learning. "School learning climate refers to the attitudes, beliefs, norms evaluations, expectations and values held by the members of a school social system that serve to enhance or impede student learning" (Lezotte,

Hathaway, Miller, Passalacqua, & Brookover, p. 34). School learning climate differs greatly from other references in the literature to school climate, which refer more to the organizational climate (Halpin & Croft, 1963) or social climate (Fox et al., 1970) in which the emphasis is on the affective satisfaction-based adult relationships. School learning climate has shown a strong positive relationship to student achievement while organizational and social climate research is unrelated or even negatively related to achievement (Lezotte et al., 1980). Descriptions of characteristics of effective school learning climates have been clustered into the ideology of the school, the organizational structure of the school, and the instructional practices of the school. The ideology is characterized by understanding that the commitment to the belief that all children are capable of learning and this belief is expressed through high expectations for achievement and is evident in language and behavior consistent with the espoused beliefs (Brookover et al., 1982). These beliefs are reflected in the organizational structure of the school and the instructional practices in the classroom.

Achievement of the goals of an organization is highly related to the structure of the organization. Differentiation of objectives and expectations for different groups of students, for example, results in stratification of a school

organization into various levels. To the extent that differential goals are set for various groups of students and the school is stratified into dissimilar levels, the average level of achievement of the students is likely to be lowered (Brookover et al., 1979).

Since the goal of an effective school should be to maximize the extent to which all students achieve mastery of basic skill objectives, the school should have one common set of objectives for all students and be organized to facilitate the achievement of those objectives by all students. (pp. 79-80)

The use of tracking or grouping practices for the purpose of sorting and selecting students is minimal. Roles and responsibilities of all employed support these structures.

Curriculum in effective schools consists of a set of well articulated objectives which lead to desired outcomes. Student performance toward these objectives was to be closely monitored with assessments directly related to the outcomes. The curriculum in higher achieving schools also showed evidence of a high degree of congruence between the written, taught and tested elements (English, 1983).

Teachers taught what was written and tested what was taught, in the way it was taught. In Milwaukee Public Schools' Project Rise, a unique approach to teaching at risk students was developed. Rather than teach the same amount of material at a slower pace, students who were behind were taught an accelerated curriculum, which had been narrowed to an essential core of knowledge. With half the amount to cover, students were expected to catch up to other students

within a year's time. Strategies such as these fostered tremendous growth in Rise Schools and challenged old ways of thinking about curriculum and student learning (McCormack-Larkin, 1985).

### Teacher Effects

Two major topics were covered in the teacher effects category; expectations and time on task. Research and literature abounds on the topic of expectations and it continues to be a major factor in student achievement.

According to Brookover (1979) teacher expectations affect student learning in two fundamental ways. First, teacher expectations are directly linked to differing amounts and quality of instruction students receive (Brophy & Good, 1974; Finn, 1972; Rist, 1970). Second, teacher expectations are indirectly linked to student achievement through students' perceptions of their ability to learn. Their perceptions are derived, in part, from the school and classroom learning climate and what they determine to be appropriate in this social setting. Thus, students' perceptions of teacher expectations and evaluations link these teacher characteristics to student academic norms, student sense of academic futility and student self-concept of academic ability (Brookover et al., 1982). The Brookover et al. (1979) study shows that one aspect of the student learning climate--student sense of academic futility--accounts for more than half of the variation in achievement. However, teacher expectations and evaluations are directly

associated with student sense of futility. Consequently, the effects of teacher beliefs and behavior toward student learning may last long after contact between teacher and student, doubling the link between expectations and student achievement.

Earlier studies illustrating the relationship between expectations and teacher-pupil interaction included the work of Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). Though the study aroused considerable controversy and criticism it served as the springboard to unlocking a key element in the teaching learning relationship. This study attempted to test the proposition that children in a classroom would show greater intellectual growth if their teacher expected such growth than if the teacher had no such expectation. The study concluded that the IQ scores of certain students, who had been earmarked by the researchers as academic "bloomers," went up more than scores of other students in the class. These students actually were not "bloomers" at all, but had been randomly selected. Their IQ's apparently went up because their teachers thought they were brighter and treated them as special. Though numerous replications of the Rosenthal study substantiated the expectancy effects (Beez, 1968; Chaikin, Sigler, & Deriega, 1974; Rubovits & Maehr, 1971), they raised the question of how the effects operate (Baker & Crist, 1971).

The study of teacher interactions in the classroom was the focus of researchers Jere Brophy and Thomas Good (1973). Using a five step model of self-fulfilling prophecy which consists of (1) the teacher expecting varied performance from specific students, (2) because of the varied expectations, the teacher behaves differently toward different students, (3) the teacher's behavior communicates to the students what behavior and achievement the teacher expects from them and affects their self-concepts, achievement motivation, and levels of aspiration, (4) the consistency of differentiated treatment over time will shape student behavior and achievement, and (5) the students behavior will conform more and more to the behavior originally expected of them. Findings from Brophy and Good's research endorsed step two of the model and revealed that teachers behave differently toward high and low achieving students by providing more opportunity and higher quality interaction to high achievers than low. Using these behaviors as the basis of further research, the L.A. County Public School launched a project to determine whether teachers could be taught to apply those behaviors, previously limited to only high achievers, to all students in the class. The project, funded by an ESEA Title III grant, found positive and significant gains in achievement of low achievers while sustaining the achievement levels of high achievers.

The other topic comprising the teacher effects aspect of the TISA program was time on task. Used as a conceptual organizer, time on task includes multiple and varied classroom instructional techniques which were found to produce high student engagement and achievement. The discussion of each of these techniques would be excessive and distracting to the focus of this study. Therefore, discussion will be limited to the concept of time on task. Several major works contribute to the concept of time on task; two were emphasized in the TISA program. First was a model developed by John B. Carroll known as the Model of School Learning (1963) which outlined the major factors influencing student success in school learning and indicated how these factors interacted. Carroll's model represented a paradigm shift from earlier thinking and a critical element was the way he defined aptitude. Rather than viewing aptitude as student potential, he defined it as measuring the amount of time required to learn a task to a given criteria level under ideal instructional conditions. He proposed that under optimum learning conditions if a student had the time he needed to learn a specified task, he would be able to do so; however, if expected to learn in less time than needed, then the degree of learning would be a function of the ratio of the time actually spent in learning to the time needed. Other student and teacher factors influenced the time needed and the time spent, such as, time allowed,

perseverance, aptitude, quality of instruction and ability to understand instruction. This model was represented in the form of a formula:

$$\text{Degree of Learning} = f \frac{\begin{array}{c} \text{TIME ACTUALLY SPENT:} \\ 1. \text{ Time Allowed} \quad 2. \text{ Perseverance} \end{array}}{\begin{array}{c} \text{TIME NEEDED} \\ 3. \text{ Aptitude} \quad 4. \text{ Quality of} \\ \text{Instruction} \quad 5. \text{ Ability to} \\ \text{Understand Instruction (Block,} \\ \text{1971, p. 5)} \end{array}}$$

Considering the long-standing classroom norm of arranging instruction around fixed units of time, Carroll's model provided a viable conceptual alternative for the development of new instructional models that held the promise for many more children to achieve success in learning. It was Bloom who transformed this conceptual model into an effective working model for mastery learning (Block, 1975). Carroll's model triggered the development of similar models and an abundance of research, including a comprehensive, six year research project known as the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES) conducted by the California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing and funded by the National Institute of Education (1980).

The BTES, a complex long-term study which examined the behaviors of highly effective teachers at second and fifth grade levels, identified important relationships between teaching behaviors, academic learning time and student achievement. The history and details of the study were recorded in a book called Time to Learn (Denham &



Lieberman, 1980). While the study provided abundant data and fostered the examination of teaching and learning through new lenses, there were fourteen major findings organized into two groups. The first set relates to academic learning time and student achievement while the second group covers teaching processes and classroom environment in relationship to student learning.

These new conceptual models were used during TISA training as the basis for examination and evaluation of a variety of instructional practices such as direct instruction, cooperative learning, classroom management.

### Change Effects

TISA participants were exposed to a brief synopsis of research on change and staff development which was meant to help them understand the process of change, conditions for effective change and the range of human reaction to change.

The overwhelmingly enthusiastic response to the school effectiveness research led to widespread, rapid implementation throughout the country which caught the attention of those interested in the study of the process of change. Efforts to implement effective school research frequently focused solely on the correlates, and according to Purkey and Smith (1983), did so in an expedient, superficial manner and paying little attention to the process of change. Concerned that the effective school movement had become a bandwagon Perkey and Smith conducted

extensive reviews of the effective schools research and found from existing studies a more expansive list of findings than was reported in any of the single studies. They explained their review of effective school literature in terms of a nested layer notion of schooling, in which the school layer sets the context for the classroom layer. They grouped the variables as organization and structure, or process variables and hoped the expanded list of variables would provide a more realistic picture of the degree of complexity involved with school improvement. Fullan (1982) addressed the issue of complexity of educational change by identifying fourteen factors affecting implementation which related to the change itself, characteristics at the district level, the school level and those external to the school. These factors included the organizational as well as human issues involved with attempted change and became an analysis checklist for TISA teams as they proposed changes for their schools.

The final aspect of change addressed in the training was the research synthesis on the stages of school improvement prepared by Miles (1985). This synthesis, drawn from several studies of effective school implementation, identified typical activities occurring during the initiation/mobilization, implementation and institutionalization phases of change. Of greater importance were the specific factors for success described at each stage.

The initiation/mobilization phase factors for success emphasized the need for clear goals, linking the change to a local agenda and needs, use of a well-structured model and process, strong support from advocates who understand the process, active initiation to begin the process (top down in OK), the creation of a cross-hierarchical team, quality data collection and quality front-end training for key people and a smaller, more stable school. The factors contributing to success during the implementation phase included such conditions as the commitment to doing it right, stable leadership, central office commitment and support, active involvement of the principal, a clear understandable model and process, clearly defined responsibilities for orchestration and coordination, shared control over implementation (top down is not OK), mix of pressure (doing it right) and assistance, adequate technical assistance from an external or internal facilitator, adequate financial resources, flexibility and encouragement to augment with other packaged programs (especially those focusing on the classroom), rewards and support for teachers early in the process, teacher commitment resulting from success, peer support within the school and use of existing work units and structures.

Success factors of the institutionalization phase includes authentic program evaluation, high quality implementation, stable program leadership, organizational

changes supporting continuation (roles, budget, procedures, policy), widespread normative use, administrative mandate, local facilitation, integrated to other change efforts, integrated with curriculum and classroom instruction, networking and peer support across schools.

The staff development module of the TISA program drew heavily on research that focused on conditions for effective staff development as well as the needs of the trainees. Findings from the Rand study conducted by Berman and McLaughlin (1978) revealed that teacher staff development activities had major positive effects on project outcomes and continuation. One was training that was concrete, ongoing, and teacher specific. Hands-on training that allowed teachers to try out new techniques and ask for the kind of assistance they needed when they needed it was most likely to lead to successful programs. The best training addressed the specific needs of each individual teacher. In contrast, one-shot; preimplementation training was usually not helpful to project staff. Training needed to be of an ongoing nature, supported by local, peer assistance, rather than reliance on external consultants whose advice was seen as too general, untimely and irrelevant. Giving extra pay for training had either insignificant or negative effects; explained possibly by teachers interest to develop professionally rather than receive extrinsic rewards. Several findings from the Rand study suggested the

importance of ongoing support and continuation of learning by providing the opportunity for teachers to discuss and work on problems through regular project meetings. The active participation on the principal in training and follow-up activities was seen as essential.

Another study by Lawrence (1974) endorsed many of the findings from the Rand study. By examining 94 studies or evaluation reports of inservice programs, Lawrence echoed the importance of individualized activities over common activities for all participants, the use of demonstrations, trials and feedback to maximize learning and that school-based programs influence more complex kinds of behaviors, such as attitudes and beliefs. Joyce and Showers (1980) describe further the necessary conditions for teachers to successfully transfer learning to the classroom to include not only sound presentation of theory or skill, but also the opportunity to see it modeled, be able to practice it and receive feedback on their practice during training, but lastly, the opportunity to receive coaching in their own classroom from someone with equal or greater expertise.

Research related to teachers personal reactions to staff development were documented in studied by Hall and Hord (1987). Noting the teachers' concerns for the quality of their work and student learning while trying to learn new skills, Hall and hord established an approach to staff development which accounted for such anxiety. The Concerns

Based Adoption Model (CBAM) was one which helped teachers recognize and deal with expected levels of concern which predictably occur as they attempt to implement new strategies and techniques in their classrooms.

The research base for TISA was meant to provide support and direction to decision-making and long-range planning for team members and as content for inservice and training efforts. Team members were expected to not only apply the research directly to their planning efforts, but to serve as inhouse trainers to nonteam staff.

This chapter provided a review of the training and the related research while the next chapter provides a review of the literature related to organizational context.

## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

#### Introduction

This chapter reviewed the literature related to organizational context in terms of (1) its importance in school improvement, (2) the current definition of context, (3) its influence in school settings and (4) the issues related to leadership and context. Of particular importance in this issue is the definition of context in terms of ecological dimensions and cultural dimensions.

#### The Importance of Context in School Improvement

Efforts to improve the quality of schooling in this country over the past three decades have been comprehensive and exhaustive. In sharp contrast to the overwhelming amount of attempted change in America's public schools, the rate and degree of successfully implemented innovations remains marginal (Fullan, 1991); a testament to the complexity of the change process and the difficulty of the task faced by those attempting to achieve meaningful, lasting school improvement.

As the knowledge base about change continues to grow, researchers are turning their attention to understanding and explaining the conditions under which change projects succeed or fail. The problem of understanding the reasons for successful or unsuccessful change projects can be explained in part by the types of research being conducted to make such determinations. Schools are social structures, yet, "much educational research ignores context and how it shaped the behavior of students, teachers, administrators and parents. In fact, much positivistic research is 'context stripping' (Mishler, 1979, p. 1) and gives the false impression that context is but a confounding factor" (Noblit & Pink, 1987, p. vii). However, ethnographers and other qualitative researchers have repeatedly revealed that context is the source of both social meaning and the basis of behavioral decisions which shape the outcomes of behavior. It is context which directs our attention one direction rather than others, and which makes conditions issues at some points in time, and not at others. Failing to recognize this influence or address it in our research gives an incomplete, inaccurate picture of school life. What is needed are richly descriptive portraits of structures and events as they exist within the context of daily life (Noblit & Pink, 1987).

Research indicates the extent to which classroom changes are implemented and how long the changes last are



"acutely susceptible" to the influence of contextual conditions in the school (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). "Existing school contextual conditions inevitably mingle with the change process to yield substantially different results from school to school" (p. xiii). To understand the impact of contextual factors on change, school leaders must examine the circumstances of schooling and the meaning given to them by all school audiences, both inside and outside of the school. According to Boyd (1992), the contexts within which those seeking to improve schools find themselves creates a set of conditions that may enhance or inhibit change. Recognizing those conditions and nurturing those that facilitate change increase the likelihood of success while, ignoring conditions that inhibit change may put school improvement efforts at risk of failure. This condition was evident in the study conducted by Burrello and Reitzug (1991). While examining six outstanding schools to determine how the principals influenced the organizational culture of their schools, Burrello and Reitzug discovered that context played a major role. In each of the six exemplary schools they studied, each of the principals was found to have had to address critical, unexpected, existing contextual issues before being able to move forward with their own agendas. So substantial were the contextual issues, that in all cases difficult decisions involving staff changes resulted and

principals indicated that the improved school cultures would not have been possible without such changes.

### Context Defined

Several definitions of context may be found in the literature. Taguiri (1968, cited by Smey-Richman, 1991) describes four dimensions in his definition of context. They are: (1) ecology, otherwise known as the physical and material aspects; (2) milieu, which is the social dimension created by the characteristics of groups of persons; (3) culture, the social dimension created by belief systems, values, cognitive structures, and meaning; and (4) the social system created by the relationships of persons and groups (p. 2). Cole and Griffin (1987) suggest the context of the school is defined by the original Latin term contextere, "to weave together." Webster's New World Dictionary (1978, p. 307) defines context as the whole situation, background, or environment relevant to a particular event, personality, creation, etc. Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone (1984) describe context as a set of local conditions which may impact the outcomes of change efforts. Such conditions include the availability of resources, relationships between persons and groups, use of educational knowledge, norms, in terms of goals and availability of incentives and disincentives, and rate of turnover. Boyd (1992) has defined context as consisting of the ecological and cultural dimensions of the school and

claims that the term addresses the interrelatedness and interdependence of all facets of school life. The ecology includes the inorganic elements of the school which, though not living, have an impact on the people of the organization. The availability of resources, the size and demographics of the school and system, and the rules and policies are ecological examples. Culture, though widely defined and described in the literature, is defined by Boyd as the organic dimension of context, consisting of attitudes and beliefs, cultural norms and relationships among members of the school. Boyd suggests that the interrelatedness and interaction of the elements of culture, along with the ecology of the school, create the context in which school improvement efforts are undertaken.

### Contextual Influence in School Settings

It was noted earlier that the role of context in school improvement efforts is important and significant. It was also noted that context is complex, with many factors mingling together to produce enhancing or limiting effects on change efforts. This section will describe, as found in the literature, how major ecological and cultural aspects of context enhance or impede school improvement change efforts.

### Ecological Factors

Ecological factors, though defined as the nonhuman dimension of organizations, profoundly affect human

characteristics and school culture, and exert tremendous influence on change efforts in schools. The availability of resources profoundly affect all aspects of new developments. When resources are cut short for planning time, staff development, implementation activities, or purchase of new materials, change activities will not progress (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). Underfunding of change projects will often delay implementation or continuation activities, affecting momentum, enthusiasm and continuity (Pink, 1990) and many change efforts fail because of inadequate time investiture (Deal, 1985; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Sarason, 1982). The time factor is also evident in change efforts when assessing progress as Slavin (1989) points out:

If education is ever to stop the swinging of the pendulum and make significant progress in increasing student achievement, it must first change the ground rules under which innovations are selected, implemented, evaluated, and institutionalized. . . . One of the most important reasons for the continuing existence of the educational pendulum is that educators rarely wait for or demand hard evidence before adopting new practices on a wide scale. (p. 752)

This quick fix approach to change has significant implications to the organization and to future change efforts compared to a process approach to change.

A particular mind-set for managing change: one that emphasizes process over specific content, recognizes organizational change as a unit-by-unit learning process rather than a series of programs, and acknowledges the payoffs that result from persistence over a long period of time as opposed to quick fixes

is what is needed (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990, p. 166). According to Deal and Kennedy (1982) three factors

affecting the amount of time necessary for change are: (1) urgency or a crisis situation, (2) the attractiveness of the proposed change to individuals, and (3) the strength of the culture that exists.

The physical arrangement of the school is another significant factor which can enhance or impede change. Several studies (Fullan, 1991; Little, 1982; Lortie, 1975; Louis & Miles, 1990) indicate that the structure of the school can contribute to the isolation of teachers keeping them apart from other professionals in the school and limiting opportunity for professional dialogue and interaction. This isolation, in turn, affects teacher attitudes and limits relationships that are essential factors in the change process. Students are also significantly affected by the physical structure of the school. According to Shanker (1989) few adults would consent to work in environments we ask students to work in daily.

They're put into a room to work with 30 or more of their peers, with whom they cannot communicate. The teacher gives them their tasks, and, when the bell rings 40 or so minutes later, they have to gather up their belongings and head to another "work station" for a whole new set of tasks with a new "supervisor" who has a different personality and, very likely, a different method of operation. This routine is repeated six or seven times a day. . . . All youngsters are expected to have sufficient motivation and self-discipline to get down to serious work on day one in anticipation of a "reward" far down the road--something most adults need all their fortitude to accomplish. (p. 3)

Fullan (1991) states that students must be involved in school improvement efforts if they are to succeed. Student's attitudes are affected, as are teachers, when subject to isolation. Schedules contribute to the confinement and isolation in much the same way as school structure and exert a pervasive influence on the thinking of those who work and study in them (Spady, 1988).

The size of the school has been shown to impact change efforts in several ways. Fowler and Walberg (1991) found that increased school size has negative effects on student participation, satisfaction and attendance, adversely affects school climate and reduces student affiliation with the school and its activities. Studies of high school dropout rates (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987) positively link larger school size with increased absenteeism and higher dropout rates. Smaller schools have been found to promote a sense of community, "have more innovative teachers, staffs that had a voice in running the schools, a family atmosphere, close community relationships and a principal who could make the best use of the staff" (Hobbs, 1989, p. 6). Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) found that small size, as defined as 500 students or less, was a common structural characteristic in twelve of the fourteen schools they identified as having demonstrated successful efforts working with at-risk students. They found the small size

promotes collegiality, makes democratic governance easier and fosters the consensus-building that sustains commitment to school goals. . . . In general, the larger the school the more difficult it is to sustain sensitive one-on-one relations between educators and students, students and students, and educators themselves. (p. 144)

A final example of how ecological factors influence contexts for effective change is the effects of local, state and federal policy. From the many state and federal initiatives to reform schools and legislate improvement few can claim any positive impact (Clune, 1991). "Some of the most essential elements necessary to restructure a school--commitment, engagement, or sense of invention--cannot be mandated" (Leiberman & Miller, 1990, p. 759), yet, because schools are public agencies, they are bound to adhere to local, state and federal policy. Chubb and Moe (1990) found that schools with a greater percentage of academically-achieving students have "substantial school autonomy from direct external control" (p. 183), and Wehlage et al. (1989) noted "without exception, educators cited autonomy as significant in their ability to construct programs that respond to students" (p. 144) in their study of schools that successfully dealt with at-risk students. States can either enhance or inhibit local efforts by imposing restrictive regulations or conversely, activating strategies such as increased funds, technical assistance and cooperative efforts between school districts and state departments (Shields, 1990). We now know that context influences each

school's change efforts uniquely (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984) making local autonomy and accountability the most promising route to lasting school improvement.

### Cultural Factors

School culture has been defined as the interrelatedness of three factors: the attitudes and beliefs of school constituents, the cultural norms within the school and the relationships between and among constituents (Boyd, 1992). It is when examining culture that differences among schools and explanations for a wide variance in school improvement success rates becomes most apparent. "Depending upon how well leaders understand and use this notion, culture can assist school improvement efforts or act as a barrier to change" (p. 28). Careful examination of attitudes and belief of teachers, students and parents is important to the outcome of change efforts.

### Attitudes and Beliefs

The attitudes and beliefs of those who work in and attend schools shape the culture of that school. Many innovative opportunities are lost because they conflict with the deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit persons to familiar ways of thinking and doing (Senge, 1990; Senge & Lannon-Kim, 1991). Attitudes and beliefs can serve as a basis for maintaining status quo and opposing change, especially when



existing structures for discussion and planning within the school are based on the principle of avoidance of controversy; at all levels, there is the feeling of individual impotence; and there is acceptance of the untested assumption that the public will oppose any meaningful or drastic change in existing regularities. (Sarason, 1982, p. 102)

This perception of the system as intolerant is one of the most frequent and strongest barriers to trying what are thought of as innovative procedures. If unchallenged, this assumption becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy evident in the work of Goldman and O'Shea (1990) who during an analysis of their school identified a system paranoia represented by statements "they won't let me do it," or "I know things hadn't changed," or "there they go again" (p. 43). Fine (1991) postulates that these belief systems provide some sense of comfort for teachers but they also prevent them from imagining what could be. Patterson, Purkey and Parker (1986) describe several widely-held assumptions about the world in which educators work which impact their attitudes and beliefs in negative ways. For example, the assumptions that "school systems are guided by a single set of uniform goals" and that "power in school systems is and should be located at the top" (p. 7) lead to behavior among school staff that prevent power sharing and shared decision making.

Attitudes and beliefs that address student potential for learning are some of the most powerful enhancers or inhibitors to change efforts. A central finding of effective schools research was that teachers and

administrators in higher achieving schools had high expectations for student learning and held the belief that all students can learn to the level thought to be representative only of students from higher socioeconomic levels (Edmonds, 1978). The Pygmalion studies (Jones, 1977) explained the powerful influence expectations and belief have on students learning in terms of the self-fulfilling prophecy which is

when an unsubstantiated judgment or evaluation of a person, situation, etc., is treated as though it were absolute fact. Subsequent actions are based on the distorted evaluation. The confirming behavior in turn convinces the person making the distorted judgment that his original assessment was correct. (Brookover et al., 1982, p. 62)

This process impacts student behavior in several ways. Gault and Murphy (1987) noted that many American schools claim to practice cultural pluralism, but in reality all students are expected to fit into the white middle class culture. Students with different cultural backgrounds, values, and skills than those generally valued by American schools may be perceived as incapable of performing to the school's standards. In a report for the Quality Education for Minorities Project (1990) the following expressed, commonly accepted myths about minority children present clear barriers to their access to quality education.

--Learning is due to innate abilities, and minorities are simply less capable of educational excellence than Whites. (p. 37)

--The situation is hopeless. The problems minority youth face . . . are so overwhelming that society is incapable of providing effective responses. (p. 37)

--Quality education for all is a luxury, since not all jobs presently require creativity and problem solving skills. (p. 38)

--Education is an expense and not an investment. (p. 38)

--Equity and excellence in education are in conflict. (p. 38)

--Minorities don't care about education. (p. 39)

--All we need are marginal changes. (p. 39)

Teachers' assumptions about students and their families, it was found (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991) reinforced their views about child development and academic learning in general. Teachers tend to blame the family for the at-risk condition rather than the child or the school.

Students attitudes toward schooling are greatly affected by teacher expectations. Houston (1991) suggests that minority students in non-urban schools may be reluctant to engage in academic competition because:

--They don't believe that their individual efforts to achieve will be rewarded by the dominant culture.

--They believe that they are intellectually inferior to their white peers.

--They resent and distrust the dominant culture and reject some of its values.

--They believe that the values of their culture are in conflict with those of the dominant culture. (p. 64)

For at-risk students to do their best in school they must believe that the teachers believe they can succeed equally

well as dominant culture students, otherwise, the attitudes will work as barriers to high achievement.

Attitudes toward change work in much the same manner as attitudes toward learning potential. Teachers attitudes about change are dependent upon their perception of how change may affect them personally (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). From their study of change Hord, et al. developed a model for adopting change that accounts for seven developmental stages of concern; each providing insight to teachers' issues and personal responses to the proposed change. Welch (1989) asserts that "for innovative change in school settings to be meaningful, its effectiveness must be proven in terms of the personal and professional growth of all involved, not just student growth" (p. 538).

Other factors which have been shown to affect teacher attitudes toward change include relevance to their needs in the classroom (Fullan, 1991), feedback about the positive results of one's efforts (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984), believing the needs being addressed are important and that they are meeting those needs (Huberman & Miles, 1984), experiencing some success in a tangible way early on in the change effort (Fullan, 1991), burnout or a sense of hopelessness that change will make a difference (Sarason, 1982), the system's legacy of experience with prior change (Corbett et al., 1984; Deal, 1990; Fullan, 1991), and life

stages and personal life events (Krupp, 1987). Attitudes toward change are essential ingredients for system development and school improvement.

### Cultural Norms

In the same way attitudes and beliefs affect change efforts, the cultural norms, which informally state how things are done in the school, will exert positive or negative influence on school improvement efforts. These norms provide the parameters for nearly all work and in some cases, personal issues. Consequently, the degree to which individual staff members internalize the norms affects greatly their satisfactions with work and outcomes of change efforts. Schein (1985) explains that "every organization is concerned about the degree to which people at all levels fit into it" (p. 42). Newcomers must be accepted by the culture or run the risk of alienation and if the culture is too constrictive, the organization can fall victim to group think (Lippitt, 1969). Internalization of the culture, according to Schein (1985), is affected by several important elements.

--Common language and conceptual categories. Members must be able to communicate to one another.

--Group boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion. One of the most important areas of culture is the shared consensus on who is in and who is out and by what criteria one determines membership.

--Power and status. Every organization must work out its pecking order, its criteria and rules for how one gets, maintains, and loses power.

--Intimacy, friendship and love. Organizations must work out the rules of the game for peer relationships, for relationships between the sexes, and for the manner in which openness and intimacy are to be handled in the context of managing the organization's tasks.

--Rewards and punishments. Every group must know what its heroic and sinful behaviors are; what gets rewarded with property, status, and power; and what gets punished in the form of withdrawal of the rewards and, ultimately, excommunication.

--Ideology and "religion." Every organization must agree on how to manage the unmanageable and explain the unexplainable. Stories and myths about what was done in the past provide explanations and norms for managing situations that defy scientific decision making. (p. 66)

A serious barrier to internalization of the school culture is frequent turnover of the staff. Turnover of certain staff members can be a positive situation when the school culture is overwhelmingly negative or resistive to improvements (Burrello & Reitzug, 1991). The moving on of certain gatekeepers allows new leadership and ideas to emerge and a more productive culture to replace the old. In all cases, high turnover presents problems for program continuity (Conklin & Olson, 1988; Pink, 1990) and the loss of project advocates gets in the way of lasting improvement (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). The issue of turnover is particularly critical when related to the principal. Depending on the significance of the implementation and the degree and style of involvement of the principal, losing the principal can have devastating effects on change efforts (Fullan, 1991).

According to Staessens' (1991) study of nine primary schools in Belgium, schools that sustain norms of introspection, collegiality, and a shared sense of purpose or vision have cultures that support innovation and school improvement. Saphier and King (1985) identified from their work with schools, twelve norms of school culture that support widespread, significant, continuous instructional improvements. They include norms that encourage high expectations, experimentation, use of the knowledge bases, involvement in decision making, protection of what is important, appreciation and recognition, caring, celebration and humor, traditions, and honest, open communication. The strength of these norms makes a difference in the rate, degree and quality of innovations in schools.

Of particular importance to cultures that are committed to improvement are norms of continuous critical inquiry, norms of continuous improvement, a widely shared vision, and a norm of involvement in making decisions. Saphier and King (1985) describe good schools as acknowledging that they have areas of strength as well as weakness which creates an openness to dealing with imperfections. Barth (1991) endorses this idea and expands it by stating the most important change to bring to schools is a cultural norm of continuous adaptability, experimentation and invention. A review of effective schools literature (Druian & Butler, 1987) revealed that

successful programs do not suppress criticism but instead provide a positive and constructive atmosphere in which criticism can occur. Conversely, a barrier to a norm of continuous improvement is the restricting of criticism which contributes to resistance to change (Fine, 1991).

Expanding the norm of critical inquiry is the norm of commitment to continuous improvement which suggests that when problems are identified, the means to rectify them will be provided (Fullan, 1991). Wiggins (1991) noted that a limited knowledge base and lack of technical support from specialists are cited as two factors that contribute to teachers' reluctance to adopt new programs, while Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) found that learning opportunities for teachers was one predictor of teacher commitment. These opportunities must not only be present, but they must be adequately and appropriately planned and implemented. Pink (1990) found that inadequate theory about school change, a lack of awareness of the limitations of teachers and administrators, and a lack of technical assistance for program development, implementation and evaluation were barriers to effective implementation of programs.

Numerous researchers have found that a shared vision increases the likelihood of successful school improvement (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Carlson, 1987; Deal, 1985; Louis and Miles, 1990; Schlechty & Cole, 1991). A shared vision is one which is held by nearly all



constituents and reflects their own personal beliefs. An espoused vision that is not reflective of constituents beliefs will fail to inspire and often will foster cynicism (Senge, 1990). Miles (1987, cited in Fullan 1991) explains that vision consists of two parts: What the school could look like and what the change process should be to achieve the desired condition. Finally, Berman and McLaughlin (1975) note in their famous study of change efforts, that when the goals of a change project are close to district priorities, the likelihood of change occurring is higher. The closer the change objectives relate to the vision, the greater the likelihood the changes will be continued. Corbett, Dawson and Firestone's (1984) study of school context and change revealed that when change fell below a district's top three priorities, problems often arise.

The norm of involvement in making decisions has been found by many researchers to be critical in the successful implementation and institutionalization of change efforts (Everson, Scollay, Fabert, & Garcia, 1986; Fullan, 1991; Pollack, Crispeels, & Watson, 1987; Raelin, 1989; Sarason, 1982; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). Teacher involvement in decision making heightens the possibility that changes will be appropriate in a particular setting and that teachers will assume greater responsibility for successful implementation of the changes (Sarason, 1982). The quality of the proposed change increases as

teachers have the opportunity to discuss all elements of the change and make changes and adaptations to proposed plans (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Leako, & Fernandez, 1989).

Participation in decision making contributes to teacher's knowledge and skills needed to change their behavior and contribute to successful implementation (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). Giroux's study (1988) suggested that educators who felt that they could influence institutional policy and practice also felt that the adolescents they worked with could be helped.

### Relationships

The importance of relationships in schools significantly affects improvement efforts. As stated earlier, collaborative professional relationships where teachers feel comfortable enough to raise issues and approach problem solving objectively, contributes to high productivity as well as feelings of professional support (Little, 1982). Little describes collegiality as occurring when the adults (1) engage in substantive discussion about practice, (2) have opportunity to observe one another in the practice of teaching and administration, (3) work together to research, plan, design, and evaluate curriculum, and (4) teach one another what they know about teaching, learning and leading. Barth (1990) suggests that collegiality promotes better decision-making, high morale and trust, enhanced adult learning and school improvement. These

attributes are endorsed by Fullan (1991) who notes that teachers learn from one another in collegial relationships and their exchange of ideas, support and positive feelings about their work contributes to improvements. Conversely, faculty factions undermine efforts to successfully implement change by sidetracking, stalling, or stopping the change process (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984).

The relationships students have with their teachers also has been found to significantly impact improvement efforts. According to Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston (1979) students in higher achieving high schools in London, England were found to have more positive relationships with their teachers and teachers modeled the behavior they desired from their students. These relationships contributed to a positive ethos in the school; ethos being the strong social norms which prescribe and influence student behavior. Ethos was found to exert such influence on student behavior, that it alone was responsible for improved student behavior and performance. These findings were later supported by Firestone and Rosenblum's (1988) study of ten urban high schools. They found that when teachers demonstrate respect, high expectations, and support for students, students respond to them in positive ways. In turn, teacher's commitment is influenced by the response they get from students. Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) found that student's commitment to school is reduced

when they recognize they are not respected; a dynamic similar to the Pygmalion effects described earlier. Conversely, Fullan (1991) describes that students will exert control to maintain status quo when they have little or no involvement in proposed change by negotiating a "live and let live" relationship with teachers that "allows some students to be left alone as long as they do not disrupt classroom life" (p. 180).

The same sense of belonging that fosters productive work environments for teachers and administrators applies also to students (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). When students do not experience this type of connectivity, "they may develop their self-esteem and perceive their ability to control situations in ways that work against their acceptance of school values and participation in important school activities" (Houston, 1991, p. 65).

The relationships that exist between parents, community and school greatly impact improvement efforts. These constituents must understand, endorse, and support proposed changes if there is to be lasting change. Parents need to be involved as co-teachers in their children's education; "to isolate the school from the broader community overlooks this need for a sense of mutual purpose and partnership" (Conklin & Olson, 1988, p. 4). For students to do their best in school it must be a learning community;

noncompetitive and emphasizing personal and caring relationships with teachers who are empathetic to students. Druian and Butler's (1987) study found that a family atmosphere in a school will reduce the possibility that students will reject the school.

### Leadership and Context

Leaders face a unique paradox when attempting to bring about school changes because they are both a part of the context while also having to contend with the impact of the context (Boyd, 1992). Reading the contextual tapestry of a school while being so closely imbedded in it requires great awareness, sensitivity and skill on the part of leadership.

### The Principal's Role as Change Agent

The principal's role in bringing about change in schools has always been significant; however, the role and skills needed to fulfill the role have changed dramatically over the past few decades, as has the process of change. For many years school improvement efforts consisted of infusing techniques or instructional strategies into existing school practice (Donahoe, 1993). These "adaptive responses" (p. 299) or fatal half measures as they were referred to by Yevgeny Yevtushenko (Donahoe, 1993) had little impact on the overall school effectiveness. Correspondingly, early models of change agency were highly

directive, prescriptive and predicated on a belief that change was a rational, linear process (Fullan, 1991). Current thinking has expanded the role from director, planner and evaluator to facilitator (Hord, 1992), supporter (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975), and co-learner (Fullan, 1993). According to Sarason (1982), the principal's contribution to implementation lies in giving moral support to the staff and in creating a culture that gives the project "legitimacy" rather than in "how to do it" advice (p. 77). Gauthier (1983) endorses the view that

change efforts fail if principals do not understand and support them, if faculties do not view them a relevant to their own goals and needs and if the community and central office do not provide ongoing encouragement, support and resources. (p. 9)

Characteristics of effective change agents have been recently described as including: being visionary, believing that schools are for student's learning, valuing human resources, being an effective communicator and listener, being proactive and taking risks (Mendez-Mores, 1992). These role changes have required new and different attitudes and skills from leadership; a condition which contributes to the dynamics of the contextual landscape and the complexity of change.

### Ecology and Leadership

Hallinger, Bickman and Davis (1990) found that ecological factors such as district size and complexity, the number and types of special programs, faculty experience and stability, school level and district

support and expectations and other factors shape the principal's approach to instructional leadership. (p. 8)

Other ecological factors such as the homogeneity of the community, socioeconomic status of families, parental expectations and involvement, and geographic location simultaneously constrain the principal and provide different challenges for leadership (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1990). Early awareness of contextual barriers and taking appropriate action to address them is essential to future efforts. The leader's sense of timing, ability to assess and prioritize severity of issues, skills, degree of risk taking all come to bear on the contextual challenges and significantly affect the outcomes.

The cultural contexts are equally challenging and simultaneous, further confounding change efforts. Certainly, the principal's personal attitudes and beliefs impact improvement efforts. Often the principal's prior experience as a teacher biases their thinking on certain issues and according to Sarason (1982), creates "the tendency to deny that problems exist in the school" (p. 147). Whether the principal rose from the teaching ranks to become the leader of the school where they once taught or within the same district versus moving to a different district where little is known of them creates entirely different contexts within which to work and hence, entirely different types of problems to confront.

### Culture and Leadership

The attitudes and beliefs of leaders are critical to the process and outcomes of change efforts. Fullan (1993) claims that "Managing moral purpose and change agency is at the heart of productive educational change" (p. 8). The degree of moral commitment the principal feels to the betterment of young people and the world will be the basis for the vision they hold for the school (Manasse, 1986). Greenfield's in-depth study of a principal (1991) revealed that the "principal's moral orientation is important to understand because it colors practically everything this principal does on a daily basis" (p. 6). Krug, Scott and Ahadi's (1990) study described in Mendez-Morse (1992) which examined the personal beliefs and goals shared by effective school leaders

found that while there was little difference between the activities of effective and ineffective principals, the meanings they attributed to their activities were significantly different. They concluded that the way a principal interprets a particular activity (beliefs)--[is] of primary importance in explaining differences between effective and less effective principles. (p. 29)

Concluding from this research that principals' behaviors are predicated on their beliefs, the degree of moral commitment a principal feels will certainly affect their bias for action.

The research indicates that leaders of change are proactive. "They take the initiative, anticipate and recognize changes in their organizational environment, and



begin to explore possible courses of action to respond to these changes" (Mendez-Morse, 1992, p. 40). Pejza (1985) stated that a "leader continuously scans the environment noticing where change is needed" (p. 10). Effective change agents recognize shifts in the environment and guide their organization to rethink the vision (Barnes & Kriger, 1986; Joiner, 1987). DeGues (1988) described this ability as organizational learning: "understanding the changes occurring in the external environment and then adapting beliefs and behavior to be compatible with those changes" (in Stata, 1989, p. 67), and educational leaders recognize paradigm shifts in areas such as curriculum issues, student needs and state level policies (Pezja, 1985; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1989). According to Mazzarella and Grundy (1989), they are "always testing the limits in an effort to change things that no one else believes can be changed" (p. 23).

Fullan (1993) identified four core capacities required as foundation for building greater change capacity: personal vision-building, inquiry, mastery and collaboration. The importance of staff members working together to address necessary changes has consistently been linked with higher achieving work environments (Fullan, 1991; Hoerr, 1996; Little, 1982), yet the principals attitudes, beliefs and comfort level related to collaboration and shared decision-making determine the degree to which it is permitted.

As mentioned earlier, school and district norms can enhance or inhibit change efforts of the principal. Norms of collaboration and collegiality, and participation in decision-making have been noted in the literature as major factors in successful change efforts (Little, 1982; Marburger, 1989). Fullan (1993) notes that the complexity of change has become so great that involvement of everyone is necessary; everyone must be a learner and provider of solutions, not just the principal. Involvement in making decisions, however, presents many challenges for leaders, especially since they often stand alone when it comes to accountability for the decisions that have been made.

Confronting long-standing norms requires a certain degree of risk-taking from the leader and as Joiner (1987) states "change must be initiated by leaders who are willing to risk their reputations for the future benefit of their companies" (p. 4). Though risks are not taken haphazardly, they are considered opportunities that will improve the school. Crowson's (1989) study reveals that when certain decisions would not serve the needs of their students, staff or the school, principals chose to disobey or at least bend the district's rules. He reports that principals risked "being insubordinate in the face of organizational/professional norms of rules" (p. 429) in order to serve student, staff and school needs. The ethical choices principals had to make were such that the "principals feel

they owe it to their children and to their school to be insubordinate if necessary in the children's interest" (p. 430). Mazzarella and Grundy (1989) note that "even though effective leaders stretch the rules, they are not rebels; they do play the game" (p. 12).

The relationships school leaders have with all school constituents affects the degree of improvement they will be able to achieve. "To lead change the leader must believe without question that people are the most important asset of an organization" (Joiner, 1987, p. 2). Joiner goes on to describe the three important dimensions of this characteristic: (1) the leader values the professional contributions of the staff, (2) the leader has the ability to relate to people, and (3) the leader fosters collaborative relations among staff. While Goodlad (1984) states that "a bond of trust and mutual support between principal and teachers . . . appears to be basic to school improvement" (p. 9), Barth (1990) cautions that the relationships between teachers and principals have become increasingly strained with growing emphasis on teacher empowerment, pupil minimum competency, collective bargaining, reduction in teacher force, increased litigation and above all, accountability. Liftig (1990) notes that administrators perceptions and labeling of leachers as "the Loafer, the Artful Dodger, and Them and teachers' perceptions of administrators as the "Snoopervisor, the

Terminator, and the Successful Incompetent" cloud this essential relationship for school improvement.

The leaders' ability to relate to people fosters recognition of professional contributions and helps create opportunities that foster collaborative relations. Mahoney (1990) found that effective leaders let their staff do the things they do best with their expertise and believe their role is to create the conditions under which subordinates can be successful.

Effective communication is central to establishing and maintaining positive relationships with constituents, noting that "in dealing with change, you have to have a capacity to relate well to all types of people" (Crowson & Morris, 1990, p. 52). Mazzarella and Grundy (1989) noted that "effective school leaders in particular, are good at communicating and have the ability and skills "they need to interact well with others; they know how to communicate" (p. 18).

The communicating and listening skills of superintendents, principals, and teachers are an important characteristic of leaders who facilitate school change. It is the basis for their ability to articulate a vision, develop a shared vision, express their belief that schools are for the students; learning and demonstrate that they value the human resources of their peers and subordinates. (Mendez-Morse, 1992, p. 39)

This chapter reviewed literature related to the concept of context and its influence within school settings. Included in this review were (1) the importance of context in school improvement, (2) the current definition of

context, (3) context's influence in school settings, and (4) the issues related to leadership and context. Of particular importance in this chapter was the defining of context in terms of ecological dimensions and cultural dimensions. These two dimensions will be used as a framework to examine the contextual influence on the purpose, structure, operation and impact of two building leadership teams in two elementary schools from a suburban Chicago, Illinois school district.

The next chapter will provide a description of the methodology used in this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

#### Introduction

This chapter describes the method and procedures which were used in researching, reporting, and analyzing the influence of organizational context on the work of building level leadership teams. Included in the chapter are: (a) the statement of the problem, (b) the purpose of the study, (c) the rationale for the methodology, (d) the procedure, and (e) a description of the sample used in the study.

#### Statement of the Problem

How to plan and sustain meaningful change has been a growing concern to educators since the early 1960s. It is now known that the ecological and cultural aspects of school context play an important role in the success or failure of school improvement efforts (Boyd, 1992). Though it is known that context influences the outcome of such efforts, it is not fully understood how the many elements comprising school context--values, resources, stability, willingness, relationships, etc.--interact to yield enabling or limiting influence, and particularly, how they have influenced the work of the building leadership teams (BLT). The purpose of

the teams, as defined in the TISA program materials, was to provide participants with the knowledge and skills to plan effective changes that would result in increased student learning. It is conceivable that, while some building leadership teams have become the cornerstone to successful and meaningful change, other teams established during the past decade, have become barriers to their own most desired outcomes. The consequence of such conditions can have devastating long-range effects on change efforts. The prediction that schools face a future of increased change (Citron, 1985) increases the need for school leaders to understand the nature of context and its influence on change efforts. This knowledge can help school and district leaders effectively address the ecological and cultural conditions in schools, increasing the likelihood that essential changes can be addressed, implemented, and institutionalized.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze how the ecological and cultural dimensions of organizational context influenced the purpose, structure, operation and impact of two building leadership teams from two elementary schools within a suburban Chicago, Illinois school district. Even though both teams had participated in the TISA program which was the preparatory training for the leadership teams that focused on their purpose, structure, operation and

intended impact, one team became a high impact team while the other team became a low impact team. This study focuses on how organizational context influenced this result.

### Rationale for the Methodology

This study attempted to determine the influence of organizational context on the purpose, structure, operation, and impact of building leadership teams in two suburban elementary schools in Illinois. The purpose of this study was to understand how context exerted its influence on the teams and why one team was perceived as high impact while the other was perceived as being low impact. These questions of how and why were central to the study and to the research design. To achieve these ends, the researcher had to obtain as much information as possible from the school site observation and staff interviews using open-ended questions.

Conditions which distinguished which research strategy to use were: (1) the type of research question posed, (2) the extent of control the investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (3) the degree of focus on contemporary or historical events (Yin, 1989). According to Yin studies which ask who, what, where, how many and how much questions, require no control over behavioral events, and focus on contemporary events are best suited to the use of surveys; while studies which ask how or why questions, require no control over behavioral events, and focus on



contemporary issues are best suited for the case study method.

Because this study sought to understand how and why organizational context influenced various aspects of building leadership teams' roles and responsibilities, the case study method was used to examine two schools, one high impact and one low impact. This researcher chose to examine two schools rather than one because according to Miles and Huberman (1984), "multiple site study provides the potential for greater explanatory power and greater generalizability than a single-case study can deliver" (p. 151). Additional data were collected from school site visit observations and review of archival records from each of the case study schools, providing demographic information, achievement performance and school district data.

Although every attempt was made to eliminate bias, this researcher's close affiliation with the TISA program, district staff, and several of the studies' participants may have been a limitation to the degree of objectivity achieved in this study.

### The Procedure

This study had two distinct phases. The first phase consisted of screening eligible schools to determine which schools would be case study schools and the second phase of the study was the in-depth study of two case study schools. The case study method was used to examine how elements of

organizational context affected the purpose, structure, operation and impact of building leadership teams in two elementary schools; one identified as having a high impact team and the other identified as having a low impact team.

### The Screening Phase

The two schools identified for the case study were selected from a population of thirty-three elementary schools located in four school districts in suburban Chicago, Illinois. All thirty-three schools participated in the TISA training in the early 1980s. It was this training that led to the establishment of the schools' building leadership teams and defined their purpose, structure, operation and intended impact. These teams were created for the purpose of leading change efforts that would result in increased student learning for all students.

During the first phase of the study the survey method was used to screen the eligible potential participants to determine which schools would be included in the study. Superintendents of the four school districts were contacted regarding their interest in having their district participate in the study. Three of the four school districts responded in a timely enough manner to be included in the study and all twenty elementary school principals in those three districts were sent letters explaining the study and requirements for participation. Of the twenty elementary principals who received letters, nineteen

expressed interest in participating in the study. The letters used to contact superintendents and principals can be found in Appendix A-1.

A thirty-item questionnaire was developed and sent to the principal, a team member teacher, and a non-team member teacher from each of the nineteen schools. The survey questionnaire, developed by using high and low impact team criteria established in Chapter II, was used to determine whether school personnel perceived their building leadership team as high impact or low impact. Questions were developed using a five-point Likert-scale to allow responses to be easily measured, permitting the researcher to initially discriminate schools with high impact teams from those with low impact teams. Survey questions were developed in relation to the purpose, structure, operation and intended impact of the building leadership teams. A high total score on the questionnaire suggested that a team was perceived as high impact while a low total score suggested a team was perceived as low impact. Based on the questionnaire, a high impact team would have been perceived by staff as:

- having student learning as their primary purpose
- having a clearly defined structure
- having clearly defined operational guidelines
- having the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and address problems that interfere with student learning
- having planned and implemented changes that lead to improved student learning.

The survey questionnaire used in this study can be found in Appendix A-2.

### The Case Study Phase

Based on the results of the questionnaire, two schools were selected to be case study schools and scheduled for a brief verification visit. The visit enabled the researcher to verify whether the perceptions of the principal and teachers who completed the questionnaire were representative of the majority of the school's staff. Observation of the school and informal discussions with teachers, support staff and students were the methods used during the verification visits.

Following the verification visit, each case study school was visited for two to four consecutive days for the purpose of collecting data from site observations, artifacts and detailed interviews with the principals, team members, and staff. The principal and this researcher established an interview schedule that was least disruptive to students and staff which would include interviews with the principal, building leadership team members, classroom teachers and other teachers. All formal interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed, allowing the researcher to code responses. Consent forms and interview questions used in this portion of the study can be found in Appendixes B-1 and B-2.

Within-site analysis was applied to the data and results were reported in narrative form as two separate

illustrations of contextual influence. A brief comparative analysis between the two sites concluded the analysis.

### Interview Procedures

Interviews were conducted with the current principal of each case study school and a cross representation of teachers consisting of classroom teachers from the primary and intermediate levels, special teachers from music, art, physical education, bilingual or special education, and teachers who were current and past members of the building leadership team, with the maximum total number of interviews permitted being ten. Each interview lasted from thirty to sixty minutes, was tape recorded and conducted in a quiet room at the school. Participation in the interview process was voluntary. The total number of interviews conducted in W-5 was four, while the total number conducted in W-1 was nine.

### Collection and Analysis of the Data

The data for this study, collected through an interview process, relied primarily on the direct experiences of teachers and principals. Data were determined significant when expressed in nearly all the interviews and could be easily triangulated, when an interview revealed singular access to a particularly important and relevant event or insight, or when the intensity of a singular direct experience was so high it

conveyed strong emotional affiliation with a situation and rendered that person's interpretation worthy of inclusion.

### Sample for the Study

The two schools chosen for this study were chosen from an initial pool of thirty-three schools. Eligibility criteria for participation as a case study school consisted of:

1. the school having participated in the six-day TISA program
2. the existence of a functioning building leadership team
3. all three survey questionnaires being completed and returned
4. both schools affiliated with the same school district
5. one school having the highest aggregate score on the survey questionnaire (a high impact school)
6. one school having the lowest aggregate score on the survey questionnaire (a low impact school)
7. a willingness to participate in the study

From the thirty-three initial schools, nineteen were sent survey questionnaires and nine, or 47 percent of the surveyed schools, returned all three as requested. This return now represented two of the three school districts surveyed. These two districts were identified as district "A" and district "W" and the responding schools of each district were numbered. The total school score was obtained by adding the total raw score of each of the three questionnaires. Figure 2 indicates the aggregate score distributions of each of the nine schools from Districts A and W. The four schools representing District A constituted

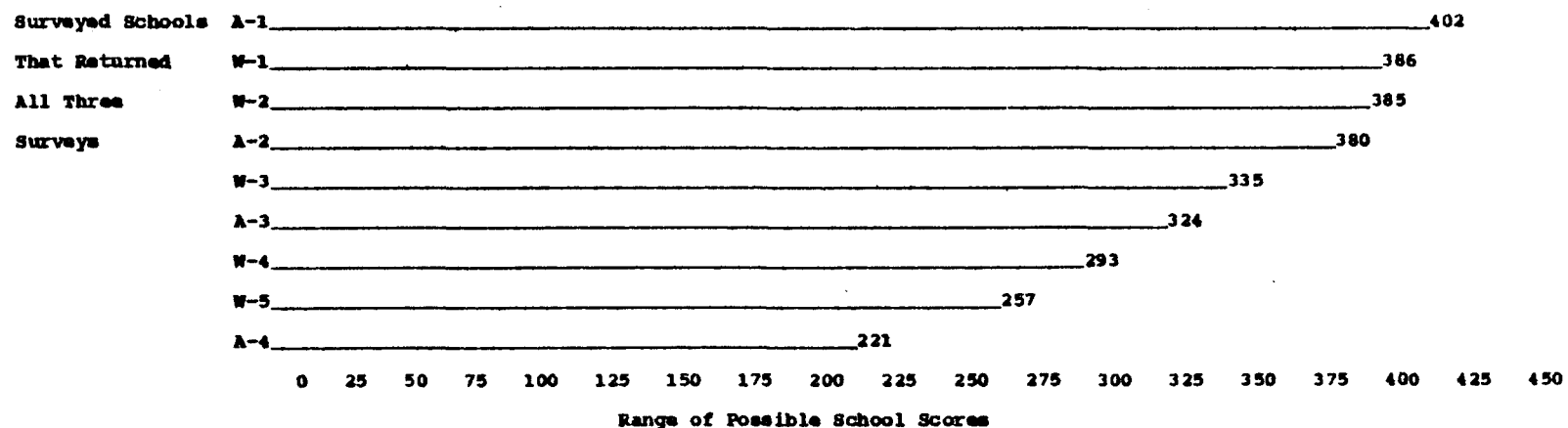


Fig. 2.—Aggregate Survey Scores for Schools in Districts A and W

33 percent of the total number of elementary schools in that district, while the five schools representing District W constituted 100 percent of the total number of the district's elementary schools.

Although Figure 2 illustrates that the highest and lowest aggregate scores listed are from schools in District A, school A-4, which received the lowest score, had been converted from an elementary school to a school exclusively for special needs students since the time of the TISA training. Although they maintained a building leadership team for planning and decision making, school A-4's conversion to a special education facility significantly altered the structure and operation of the building leadership team, rendering it to be too disparate from the other teams in the study. On that basis school A-4 was eliminated for consideration in the study. Therefore, the next lowest score considered was represented by school W-5, and the correspondingly high-scoring school from District W was school W-1. Both schools, W-1 and W-5, met all criteria established for participation in the study and were selected as case study schools.

This chapter described the methodology used in the study and included the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the rationale for the methodology, the procedures followed during the study and a description of the sample chosen from and for the study. The next chapter will



present the data collected and analysis of those data. It includes case studies of one high impact building leadership team and one low impact building leadership team and concludes with a brief analysis of the ecological and cultural influence in each case study school.

## CHAPTER V

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Introduction

While Chapter IV described the research methodology and procedures, this chapter presents a description and analysis of the data. Included in this chapter is the purpose of the study, a brief profile of the school district, comparative demographic and achievement data for the school district and the two case study schools, presentation of case studies, and a brief analysis of the two case studies.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze how the ecological and cultural dimensions of organizational context influenced the purpose, structure, operation, and impact of two building leadership teams from two elementary schools within a suburban Chicago, Illinois school district. Even though both teams had participated in a common training program which focused on their purpose, structure, operation and intended impact, one team became a high impact team while the other team became a low impact team. This study

focused on how organizational context influenced this result.

### Presentation of the Data

Data for this chapter were obtained through artifacts, observations and interviews with teachers and administrators from case study schools. The narrative was developed primarily from the aggregate perceptions expressed in the interviews. Criteria for the inclusion of data were based on the repetition of perceptions, the intensity of feeling portrayed by a single interviewee or the uniqueness of proximity or access to information by a single interviewee. If, for example, only one person could speak to the historical reference of a highly significant event, it was included. The objective of the narrative was to construct a portrait of the school, the team and the significant contextual events and conditions that shaped the purpose, structure, operation and impact of the building leadership team.

### District Profile

The school district in this study was located in suburban Chicago, Illinois and was one of the economically poorest school districts in one of Illinois' wealthiest counties. Encompassing about 40 square miles, the district served approximately 3,000 students distributed among five elementary schools and one junior high school. The

elementary schools served students in grades kindergarten through sixth grade, although some of the elementary schools also administered preschool programs. The district's junior high school served students in grades seven and eight.

The district boundaries defined a long narrow configuration with a major four-lane road splitting the district in half lengthwise. The small town nestled in the western portion of the district was a regular stop for commuter trains connecting western communities with Chicago, Illinois. The community is also a major stop for freight trains, a distinguishing feature from the other suburban communities. The railroads coupled with a small commercial airport and other light industry in the community provide the basis of the district's financial support beyond the local property tax. Due to the nature of the local business and industry and the availability of inexpensive housing, the community has a substantial low-income population.

The community was both economically and culturally diverse, consisting primarily of Caucasian and Hispanic populations. The highest concentration of low-income population was centrally located in the district and students from this area attended primarily three of the district's five elementary schools. Most of the wealth was located on the outskirts of the district which had experienced new growth of large, pricey homes. This distribution of wealth in the district had remained stable

for many years and the economic disparities fostered feelings of frustration among staff members and contributed to varying attitudes about, and expectations of, students' ability to learning.

The district central office positions had remained constant for the ten years between the time when schools participated in the Training to Increase Student Achievement (TISA) and this study. Central office staff consisted of a superintendent, business manager, curriculum director (later called assistant superintendent) and director for pupil personnel which administered primarily special education and bilingual education. The superintendent was responsible for personnel. Though the number and type of positions in the central office remained constant, the rate of turnover in all of these positions, other than the superintendent position, was extremely high. During the ten years between the original TISA training and this study, there were three curriculum directors, three business managers and three pupil personnel directors. The curriculum position had also been filled by two additional people in the three years prior to the training. At that time the curriculum director also served as principal of one of the schools. Interestingly, each of the principals who filled this dual role of curriculum director and principal, was a case study school principal.

The high rate of turnover in the central office affected the continuity and work of building leadership teams. The teams were developed by this researcher who also served as the district's director of curriculum for the first year following the training. The next curriculum director who remained in the district for three years, had not participated in the training, put forth little effort to learn about the program and made few provisions for the training of new principals or staff. It was not until five years after the original training that the need for additional training for the teams was addressed. The staff at school W-5 saw this as a major problem for them as evidenced in these statements:

During the interview process [for the principalship] I wasn't given information about the building leadership team. I learned it existed, but I wasn't given information about what its purpose was, how it ought to occupy itself. I think it was probably left up to the team to let me know when I got here.

There was strong endorsement from W-5 staff members that although the central office endorsed the concept of the BLT, their failure to provide continuous staff development played a part in the team's demise. "We have a BLT, the subs are provided, the time [to meet] is there, the schedule is set up." At the same time,

I don't think the new principal was taken through the purpose of the BLT while he was going through his orientation as a principal. I don't think there's even enough booklets left or guidelines sitting around so even the new principal would know how to tackle this.

There was strong sentiment from both case study school staffs that although the central office personnel espoused commitment to the success of the teams, in reality little leadership was available to help principals use the teams effectively. It appeared to teachers that central office staff were more concerned with personal agendas and using their positions as stepping stones to higher level positions elsewhere than helping the teams become more productive. The perceived lack of support for the teams coupled with high accountability for student performance reduced central office staff credibility and generated trust issues, leaving the teams to find their own way to improvement. The superintendent was perceived by many team members as responsible for much of the discord and was described as being more concerned with a personal and political agenda of looking good than providing what was needed by the schools to help them help students learn, as related by numerous W-5 and W-1 interviewees.

I think it [central office] lacks support of its leadership. I think they need to support their principals and if they are going to have these teams they need to support them.

I think it looks great on paper, to write down, yes, we have a BLT, we have inclusion, we have all these wonderful things going on . . . on paper. So the state department comes in there, it's a politically correct thing to have all this stuff, but it doesn't really occur or really happen.

[There's] a lot of on paper stuff, a lot of show what is, but not assessing whether it's getting at what you want it to be getting at.

Communication from central office was also identified as unintentionally creating barriers for teams, as noted by the W-1 principal.

I'm not frequently finding that central office is--that their focus is clear to the whole district. The part that I think is lacking is communication. It isn't that things aren't done, but it's the way things are being communicated. The current assistant superintendent strives real hard to share minutes and pieces of information and incorporate different people into committees that will go back and share with the committee structure and sometimes what a committee decides doesn't necessarily trickle down to what happens in the classroom. Sometimes we get restricted somewhat in terms of what we can initiate in the building because it doesn't fit the centralized model. But sometimes we don't know that until we start to build something and then suddenly we find it doesn't fit the model, but we didn't know the model was there.

Opportunity for principals to support one another by sharing progress and roadblocks their teams experienced was built into the regular administrative meetings during the first year of implementation. During subsequent years the sharing process shifted its focus from team operation to inquiry about student performance on state assessments, changing the tone of meetings from support and problem solving to confrontation and blame. As reported by W-5 teachers, central office was often accused by the principals of sending double messages; encouraging them to take risks, try new improvements, to share concerns and be open, but when student scores dropped, the principals claimed to have been humiliated before their peers.



### Comparative Data

The data for this section was taken from the School report Cards for school W-5 and school W-1. These documents were developed annually by the Illinois State Board of Education as a requirement of legislation passed in the summer of 1985 and exist for the purpose of providing each school's community with pertinent performance and demographic information about their school, their school district and the state. The Report Card includes performance data from the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) which are annual assessments required of all students in Illinois. Data were reported in the areas of reading, math and writing for the years 1991, 1992, and 1993 which were the most current, consecutive, three-year's worth of data available at the time of this study.

The demographic data from school W-5 and school W-1's Report Cards listed in Table 2, indicate that the schools share very similar racial/ethnic composition. Both schools are comprised primarily of Hispanic and Caucasian populations and show a decline in the Caucasian population and a corresponding increase in the Hispanic populations between the years 1991 and 1993. School W-5 had a distribution of 51.3% Hispanic to 45.5% Caucasian in 1993, while school W-1 had a distribution of 57% Hispanic to 38.2% Caucasian in contrast to the District distribution of 33% Hispanic to 63.9% Caucasian. School W-5's total enrollment

grew from 585 in 1991 to 638 in 1993 while school W-1's increased from 441 in 1991 to 553 in 1993.

Table 2.--Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment for for Schools W-5, W-1, and District for 1991, 1992, 1993

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American	Total Enroll- ment
<u>W-5</u>						
1991	59.8%	2.6%	37.3%	0.3%	0.0%	585
1992	54.5%	2.4%	42.9%	0.2%	0.0%	574
1993	45.5%	2.0%	51.3%	0.6%	0.6%	638
<u>W-1</u>						
1991	48.1%	3.2%	45.8%	2.9%	0.0%	441
1992	42.2%	3.2%	52.5%	2.0%	0.0%	495
1993	38.2%	2.5%	57.5%	1.8%	0.0%	553
<u>District</u>						
1991	69.0%	2.2%	27.8%	1.0%	0.1%	2,936
1992	67.1%	1.8%	30.0%	1.1%	0.0%	3,087
1993	63.9%	1.9%	33.0%	1.1%	0.1%	3,291

Table 3 indicates the percentage of students from school W-5 and W-1 who are considered low-income or limited-English proficient. Low-income students are pupils, age 3 to 17, from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds or eligible to receive free or reduced-priced lunches. Limited-English proficient students are eligible for bilingual education. Each of these characteristics adds additional challenges for student learning. Schools W-5 and W-1 are closely matched for low-income and limited English proficient student

populations and each have higher concentrations of these students than the district average. Table 4, displaying the attendance and mobility rates, reveals that attendance has been consistently high for both schools with mobility stabilizing at about 22 percent. The unusually high rate of mobility of 40 percent experienced at school W-1 in 1993 was an isolated situation accounted for by a shifting of boundaries within the district. Achievement data displayed in Table 5 (p. 105), for reading, math and writing indicate an overall consistently higher performance from school W-1 than W-5, with both schools usually performing above state averages.

Table 3.--Low-Income and Limited-English Proficient Students in Schools W-5 and W-1 for 1991, 1992, 1993

	Low-Income	Limited-English Proficient
<u>W-5</u>		
1991	21.5%	31.1%
1992	24.7%	22.1%
1993	29.5%	20.2%
<u>W-1</u>		
1991	30.3%	12.0%
1992	34.3%	14.7%
1993	26.8%	22.6%
<u>District</u>		
1991	19.9%	16.8%
1992	22.0%	13.8%
1993	21.9%	14.7%

The demographic data show the two schools to be closely matched with W-1 having a slightly higher mobility

rate, Hispanic population and higher limited-English proficient population than W-5, and sustaining higher achievement than W-5 in reading, math and writing for a three year period.

Table 4.--Attendance and Mobility Rate for Schools W-5 and W-1 for 1991, 1992, and 1993

	Attendance Rate	Student Mobility Rate	Number of Chronic Truants
<u>W-5</u>			
1991	95.4%	28.2%	0
1992	95.6%	19.6%	0
1993	95.4%	19.4%	0
<u>W-1</u>			
1991	95.8%	23.3%	0
1992	95.3%	25.3%	5
1993	95.6%	40.2%	0
<u>District</u>			
1991	95.7%	20.2%	1
1992	95.6%	17.0%	5
1993	95.8%	22.7%	3

#### Case Study School W-5

##### The School and Its Community

Located within view of the district office building and the junior high school, school W-5 was a one-story brick building with a circular drive in front and ample playground and playing fields to the side and back. Aside from the large potholes in the blacktop, the school appeared to be reasonable well kept and was probably built during the 1950s which would explain its narrow windows, abundant wood trim

and dark tile floors. Although student work was displayed in the halls, the dimly lit entrance and dark floors made school W-5 feel cold and institutional.

Table 5.--Comparative Achievement of Schools W-5 and W-1 at Grades 3 and 6 for 1991, 1992, 1993

Grades	1991		1992		1993	
	3	6	3	6	3	6
Reading						
W-5	248	262	232	283	245	281
W-1	278	264	277	275	284	274
District	269	267	258	265	256	262
State	249	253	247	244	245	259
Math						
W-5	276	288	285	276	264	268
W-1	290	285	247	323	292	282
District	291	284	279	273	274	258
State	255	253	261	251	268	257
Writing						
W-5	18.8	25.2	17.6	25.2	17.2	22.7
W-1	16.4	24.4	18.8	24.8	18.5	23.4
District	17.7	23.9	18.2	24.1	17.6	21.8
State	17.3	21.1	17.7	22.3	17.7	21.4

According to the principal, school W-5 was home to approximately 600 kindergarten through sixth grade students along with 60 adults who work in the building, of which 23

were classroom teachers. The nonclassroom staff consisted of teachers for art, music and physical education, numerous pupil personnel service persons, part-time social work and psychologist, a speech and language teacher, bilingual support, 2 inclusion facilitators, a half-time Chapter 1 reading teacher, part-time occupational and physical therapists, 2 reading aides, 2 classroom aides, and 14 classroom inclusion assistants. The school served a student population comprised of about 51% Hispanic, 46% Caucasian and a very small percentage of either Black or Asian students. Of the Hispanic population, about 15% to 20% received their daily instruction for all content areas in Spanish within 4 self-contained classrooms. Approximately 30% of the student population was considered low income and received free or reduced lunch at school.

The community for school W-5 was comprised of low-middle income families who held blue-collar jobs and lived primarily in very small, single family houses or apartments. Most students walked to school with a very small percentage riding the bus. The community was about half Hispanic and half Caucasian and housing was fairly well integrated, barring one apartment complex set apart from the rest of the community which housed mostly non-English-speaking students. These apartment dwellers were the students who also rode the bus.

Staff reported feeling the impact of these changing demographics. With the increases in non-English-speaking students had come changes in the community and the addition of special programs and staff in the school. In addition to having their own food stores, restaurants and banks within the community, the Hispanic population filled four, full-time, self-contained, bilingual classes in the school placing greater demands on existing resources and raising issues among non-bilingual staff about class size and accountability for student performance. "We are growing all the time. I mean you are adding more and more bilingual teachers, when you don't have enough classroom teachers. I think the handwriting is on the wall; I just don't understand it."

The differences in culture and language were thought to also have impacted involvement and participation of parents in the school. Teachers who had been at the school for many years saw a decrease in the number of volunteers who came to the school to help and a change over the last ten years in the relationship between parents and the school. Some staff attributed this in part, to increasing cultural differences brought on by the changing demographics in the community.

There seems to be a cultural norm in the Hispanic community that the teachers are revered and you never tell them, [your concerns] make suggestions or anything; there's this intimidation about the school that keeps them at bay, so it really would require a tremendous outreach [from the staff].

Another explanation staff provided for limited parental involvement in the school was the mixed messages different principals have sent to the community. The first principal was perceived as telling parents whatever they wanted to hear while the third principal was perceived as not wanting to see parents. "We had one schmoozer who could get the parent to believe anything and then we had a principal that has been hard-nosed, [and sent the message] that he does not want to see the parent." Staff members believe these varied styles confused parents, reduced their trust, and kept them out of the school.

### The Principal

As noted in the literature the principal is significant to the contextual fabric of the school. Not only must the principal address contextual influences in the school but they are an important aspect of the context.

The most distinguishing feature about the W-5 principalship was that there were four principals in the ten years between the time of the original training and the time of this study. According to all W-5 interviews, the high rate of turnover, coupled with the incompatibility between principals and staff was reported to have had a profound influence on the school's leadership team.

The first principal was responsible for W-5's participation in TISA before it became a district-wide initiative. He had been an administrator in the district



for many years and had also served a dual role for a number of years as principal and district curriculum coordinator. W-5 was the first team in the district to participate in TISA and they did so in an out-of-district training. The rest of the schools from the district received their training as a whole group, in-district experience. W-5 later joined the district TISA training for selected portions. At this point, because of their advanced exposure to the training, W-5 was actually seen as leading the BLT effort in the district.

According to W-5 staff who knew him, principal one was described as a "schmoozer" whose main purpose was to create harmony within the school and with the central office. According to staff, as a school administrator, he saw his role as a manager and did a reasonably adequate job of "meeting deadlines and getting things done." However, he did not like to rock the boat nor confront issues. As reported by the teacher with the longest tenure of those interviewed, the principal described his attitude and behavior as a by-product of many years of unsuccessful attempts to communicate with the superintendent, "who was known to be highly critical of mistakes." Others in the district, however, described this principal as having been unwilling to put forth much effort on anything. He was viewed as not following through on tasks, running the school from behind his desk and being a low-risk, somewhat "lazy,

good ole boy" who exerted minimal effort. According to a W-5 staff member, "The principal was what you would call a lame duck, he was burned out." Apparently, his leadership lacked vision and he lacked the facilitation skills necessary to successfully implement shared decision-making.

It was expressed during several interviews that they suspected that his motive for enrolling a team was to have teachers take on some of the work he was expected to do related to the newly implemented state reform mandates. As noted by all W-5 interviews, the state mandates endorsing school improvement and increased teacher involvement were a focal point in the district and certainly added pressure for someone lacking such skills. Regardless of his motive for attending the training, he failed to clearly explain to his staff the intent and purpose of the training prior to their involvement, which was a condition for participation in TISA as described in Chapter II. The staff was to have made the decision to participate based on their understanding of the program which was clearly not the case for W-5. In retrospect, based on participation criteria, they should have deferred participation to a later time when conditions were more favorable, for it left the team with much expected of them externally and little sense of purpose internally. After participating in the training he continued as principal of W-5 for two years, and then retired.

The next principal to assume leadership of W-5 was a young woman whom staff described as "the one we tried to get through to be a good principal, but that didn't work." She had not participated in TISA training and received no training from the central office. She was perceived by staff as a nice person but totally unable to confront the mounting issues born from years of frustration. One teacher described the situation in this way,

well, I just think she was mismatched with this group, they were so hard on her, we were so hard on her, because she wanted to be more democratic and . . . I don't know, we just had a lot of turmoil, or a lot more personality clashes.

Little more was said about her other than the fact that she stayed for four years and staff felt compelled to try and help her cope with the situation.

The third principal remained in the position for two years and had a very contrasting style to the woman who preceded him. Although teachers were involved in the interview process for this principal, he was not their first choice. Their first choice candidate did not accept the position and through a set of strange circumstances, the selection committee could not convene in its entirety, time was running out, and the final selection was made by just two teachers, who, because of the circumstances felt they had no other choice.

Again, this principal had not received any explanation nor training from central office about the BLT

or its operation. He was soon perceived by teachers as having a highly confrontational, controlling and coercive style of leadership as illustrated in this statement.

There appears to have been a time over the past couple of years when people might bring something, a concern or a frustration, to the administrator who was here at the time, and then that person would go chew out the person that was tattled on, as it were, who would then go back to the first person and it just created a lot of hard feelings, and it became a situation where it wasn't safe to raise concerns or problems; and no way to deal with them.

W-5 interviewees reported that teachers saw him as untrustworthy and quickly surmised that he was not one to whom they should speak openly or candidly. A staff member described the level of mistrust as "I am not a very confronting person, and I would have mental arguments with him and I would think he was lying, and I'd know he was lying. The whole meeting was unproductive." One staff member described him as "a control freak who made us fight him on every issue."

At the time of this study the fourth principal to assume leadership at W-5 was completing the first year of his first principalship. Based on formal and informal conversations with staff, he had clearly made a positive impact during that first year. Prior to becoming a principal he taught flight and ground school adult education in the private sector followed by six years as a classroom teacher in public schools. With degrees in aviation technology, elementary education, administration completed,

he was pursuing doctoral studies. He expressed interest in continued learning and reported staying current of educational trends and issues through reading professional publications, attending board meetings, and graduate classes. He described his leadership style as task-driven, human relations which when applied to the work world meant he "gets things done through people." In his words, "people are the end result, the product as well as the means, and there are tasks that need to be done along the way, but it's always for the purpose of serving people." He placed high value on student learning, staff and administrator responsibility for finding best practices that would lead to student learning, and on participatory style of management. He appeared comfortable sharing and discussing these ideas.

The selection of this principal was the result of much involvement of the staff. The district had hired a consultant to address the mounting climate issues in the building and as a result, interviewed the whole staff, one by one, to help them identify concerns, problems and difficulties. An outcome of the interviews was the development of a search committee that eventually selected the principal.

This principal had not participated in the TISA training for building leadership teams and had little notion what the teams were supposed to do.

### The Story of the W-5 BLT

During the school year of 1984-1985 school W-5 enrolled a team in the TISA program. There were no other teams from their district enrolled because the training was structured in that way at that time; the rationale being that schools would have no fear of addressing their issues if there were not other schools from the district represented. As observed by this researcher, who conducted the TISA training, W-5 was a team with many "yes buts" and challenged many of the fundamental concepts and core beliefs related to student learning and change. Though this researcher, and trainer at the time, harbored doubts whether the team fully endorsed the concepts, the principal provided convincing assurances that they were fully on board. Ten years later the structure and basic operation of the team suggested during the original training was in tact; however, the W-5 team never achieved a meaningful, driving purpose nor substantive impact on student learning. Numerous conditions and factors contributed to this unproductive outcome. Reviewing the events and conditions of the past ten years through the eyes of teachers and administrators provided insights and explanations for this team's fate. This case study highlighted the major factors, conditions, and occurrences throughout the ten years between team formation and this study which influenced the team's development and ultimate level of effectiveness and impact.

## The Early Days of the Team

"I don't think this team has functioned properly in all the years that it has been in existence" were the sentiments expressed by a twenty-six year, veteran W-5 teacher who had been a team member several times throughout the past decade. Her statement reflected the views of many of the veteran staff and revealed years of frustration and confusion.

The original W-5 team consisted of a balance between enthusiasts and resisters as suggested in the pretraining awareness program, and they represented a staff that had cultivated a reputation over the years of being difficult to work with, uncooperative within the district, and somewhat negative. At least eight teachers from those early days currently remained on staff and were described by the most current principal in the following manner:

I think there are a couple of individuals on the staff that, their interpersonal style does come across negative. Some are able to have a very profound impact by virtue of, you know, facial expression, body language that comes across with disgust or disdain, and it can put a wet blanket over . . . the climate. Another has a reputation of being very outspoken and not very sensitive in that outspokenness, and that's put a damper on things and has kept a number of people from sharing ideas because right away they're capsized and it just wasn't safe to say anything, even positive, because negative points would always be found. There was enough of a minority that was real negative and back-biting that it affected the whole group.

In addition to the norms of negativism and outward criticism between teachers, the staff was characterized as low risk and unwilling to accept the challenges of leadership. This

norm was described as teachers not really viewing themselves as decision makers. They believed their job was to teach and the principal's job was to solve problems and make the decisions. These clearly defined roles and long-standing norms of behavior were incongruent with the core values of the TISA program and the primary purpose of building leadership teams. This condition, in and of itself presented problems for the newly developed team, but by no means sealed its fate. Other schools involved in the training encountered similar conditions and found ways to work around the barriers. A major factor determining whether teams confronted these issues or avoided them was the principal. The principal at the time of the team's origin was described as a schmoozer who would rather appease than confront. He lacked skills that would enable teachers to resolve their differences and come together for a common goal. In many ways, he saw the team as a means of personal support and to assume a little of the responsibility he felt burdened by. He was described as a manager, not a leader. He lacked vision for the school and relied heavily on what the training said the team was supposed to be doing rather than doing what the team needed to be doing, which was confronting the contextual issues within their school, the negative norms, the resistance to decision making, and the destructive behavior of particular staff members that threatened the newly formed leadership team. A major



teaching of the TISA training was to involve the entire staff in decision making and several techniques were presented to achieve that involvement. For whatever reasons, that involvement did not occur at W-5 which set the team on a course of going through the motions of a team rather than being a team. The team wrote the mission statement rather than enrolling the entire staff in the development of the mission, the team made the decisions rather than being the facilitators of decision making and the team became an isolated little group that was unsure of its purpose. These early actions and inactions of team members and principal defined the level of integrity of the newly formed structure which remained in place for ten years.

Shortly after W-5 participated in the TISA training the remainder of the schools in the district participated, which was a departure from past training protocol. The W-5 team was involved in portions of the training but not in its entirety. The expanded involvement of all district schools called for the creation of a support structure and a system for continuous team renewal. The process put in place provided the principals the opportunity to share the progress and problems their teams were experiencing and to acquire assistance, ideas and problem solving from colleagues. For some, this time was extremely productive and helpful. Joint projects and expanded collaborative

activities began to emerge. Initially, school W-5 was actively involved in these meetings but over time had less and less to share. Conditions in the building were deteriorating but the principal handled this condition by avoiding issues and portraying the BLT efforts as going well. These meetings provided support but also accountability. This resulted in pressure and discomfort and the principal decided to retire. Change also occurred at the central office level and the curriculum director, who had coordinated the progress of the teams during the first year of implementation, left the district.

#### Transitions

At this point, staff relations in W-5 were deteriorating, a new principal was on board, a new curriculum director was in the central office; both newcomers to the district. Neither the new principal nor the new curriculum director had participated in TISA nor had they conversed with the TISA trainer. The district superintendent offered no transition for the newcomers yet one administrator was expected to lead the efforts of the district's teams and the other was expected to assume membership with the W-5 team.

The W-5 team continued to meet at its regularly scheduled times, the district continued to pay for substitutes to release teachers to meet. The purpose of the BLT, which was loosely defined during the tenure of the

first principal, became that of helping the new principal deal with the problems of the building and staff. According to teachers "for a couple of years the team was trying to coach the principal on how to be a principal, and it got to be nothing but a . . . I guess a self-improvement training." The team continued to work on its mission statement, and addressed minor issues such as the Halloween parade. The operational guidelines, which were never formally established and recorded, consisted of teachers generating problems and giving them to the team to give to the principal to solve. "You just bring it up and tell them what you want to do. If they [the team] want to change it they change it." Again, the lack of leadership contributed to the team becoming a dumping ground for low level issues, resolving conflicts teachers had with one another, and a support structure for an insecure second principal. Over the next four years the BLT continued to resolve issues that should have been resolved between staff members, creating deeper lines of discord within the school. Operational procedures at one point required that staff write anonymous notes to the BLT if they had a complaint about things, such as special teachers not picking classes up on time, or certain teacher's classes being too noisy in the hallway. The principal failed to redirect the team's efforts to a higher purpose and the team became a major part of the preexisting climate problem in W-5.

Staff avoided joining the team with the exception of those harboring a personal agendas. The structure of the team with four teachers and the principal, serving two-year terms and replacing half the teachers every year remained in tack but the process for identifying who would serve changed frequently. Teachers indicated:

Sometimes you were voted on and didn't even know you were on it, sometimes you had to volunteer and sometimes you had to write a reason why you wanted to be on it and the team decided if you had a good enough reason for being on it.

The team at W-5 had no resemblance to other teams in the district and district level sharing sessions became painful reminders of how far they were from the intended purpose. Topics for discussion were unrelated to long-range planning, school improvement or quality learning for students. As described by a recent team member,

I think the work that's ever been done at BLT is very limited. There's not staff development planned, there's not research. It's more like a discussion, is what it turns out to be. . . . All of a sudden it comes up, so it's like oh, so what are we going to talk about, you know what I mean? I don't think it's that organized, like with agenda items.

The result of this use of BLT for four years fostered even greater mistrust among teachers and drove them to retreat to the isolated, but protected world of their classrooms. Lack of intervention from central office permitted the deterioration of nearly every professional fiber in the school. A third principal was hired and became the final destructive force before central office would take

action. Once again, the absence of training and guidance from central office coupled with the selection of a completely incompatible leadership style fostered two more years of decline at W-5. By now the BLT had no credibility and was seen as merely a vehicle for control. Staff hated coming to work.

The past few years were very stressful for me, and it was because you would just walk around and you would see people crying and [avoiding] people that you don't like. We would spend so much energy comforting each other, or bashing somebody you would see it everywhere. I would just walk in every morning and my stomach would be in knots. It was a real tough place to be, because the people, the adults weren't getting along.

If I could compare it to an alcoholic, you had to get so low, because they [the staff] wouldn't recognize it, something had to be done. We just couldn't go on like this, it was just so dysfunctional.

### The Turning Point

The climate had hit rock bottom at W-5 and oddly enough, as they learned that they were getting yet another principal, and this one was a first year principal, staff discovered that amidst all their disagreement they agreed on one thing: "how much we hated our previous administrator." That feeling was a common bond and they soon realized they "had to pull together to help the new guy because he wasn't going to be able to do this on his own."

The superintendent finally intervened and was perceived by staff as having done so only because the school had become an embarrassment to him and because the school board applied pressure on him to do so. As a result,

several teachers were transferred to other schools in the district and a consultant was hired to work intensely with teachers to diffuse the hostility and understand their problems. This work resulted in the formation of a search committee to locate and hire a new principal for W-5, the fourth person to assume leadership in ten years. Equipped with a highly collaborative style of leadership and an abundance of optimism staff responded well to his early decision to provide staff training on conflict resolution, team building and helping the staff develop their own decision-making model.

There was widespread consensus among staff and central office that the school was ready for change.

Principal four stated:

I think that the building as a whole was very ready for change. They were aware of widespread discontent, widespread lack of trust, widespread lack of unity and direction, and they were really looking for and hoping for some way to get pulled back together. I don't think that the initiative came through BLT. It came from the staff at large and the staff at large has responded to that by developing a method of broadening participation in decision-making for the whole staff.

Other important changes in W-5 were the addition of many new teachers and aides to the building. Transfers and retirements vacated many positions and new programs added staff creating a new constellation of human dynamics. Of those interviewed, all described the new staff as having a very positive impact on the school and they clearly constituted a majority. There was a flow of new thinking,

combined with the existing staff's readiness for change, that created a new energy in the building.

At the time of this study the BLT had not been dismantled or replaced by the new decision-making model. The principal was attempting to use the BLT as a vehicle for involvement and as a means to help staff apply their confrontation skills. He indicated:

I think the staff has needed to know that its concerns are being heard, so I've continued to allow that to be a part of the meeting time and have learned along the way better ways of addressing concerns. If there are interpersonal kinds of things [issues raised], I do a lot more encouragement for people to get with one another rather than to come out with the dictator or memo . . . on some kind of procedural change. I've also tried to bring the group a little more into goal-setting, building goals, academic goals.

As a result of these efforts, some of the old, normative, staff expectations for the principal to solve problems the BLT fields from staff are beginning to give way to more productive discussions and planning. There was even reference made by the principal:

to the BLT using the new decision-making instrument as a tool to include the staff in their long-range planning, goal setting, action plan sequencing so that instead of being perceived as a secret group doing things behind closed doors they would be doing their work of planning and goal-setting with an instrument that would insure that the whole staff had a part in developing the ideas. In fact, it [the BLT] will probably use the decision-making model as a way to evaluate itself and even restructure itself.

When asked, all staff interviewed expressed feelings of guarded hopefulness about their future, which was a significant improvement over descriptions of life there

during the past two years. Whether the BLT remained a part of school life at W-5 was of little significance compared to the catalytic role it may have played in helping staff understand their behavior and decide to change.

### Analysis of Influencing Factors

Ironically, the new decision making model developed by W-5 teachers incorporated many of the same basic principles from which the BLT operated. Important differences in the two models refer not to the models per se, but the contexts or set of circumstances in place at the time each process was introduced to staff. The main challenge of describing contextual influence has been in the simultaneity of occurrence and the constant intermingling of events and circumstances. Though such events and conditions were sorted and recorded on matrices in Table 6 and Table 7 their influence rarely stands alone, and must be described in a more integrated manner. The following analysis describes some of the major influences of contextual variables on the purpose, structure, operation and impact of the W-5 BLT.

The W-5 BLT was born into a context of changing times, frighteningly unclear new roles and responsibilities and an unclear leader at the helm. The norms and practices at W-5 had always been that administrators make the decisions and teachers taught students. The concept of



Table 6.--Major Ecological Influences on Building Leadership Team W-5

Ecological Context	Purpose	Structure	Operation	Impact
Resources	The high turnover of principals coupled with lack of training support from central office lead to loss of purpose. Superintendent's refusal to reassign problem staff sustained non-leadership norms.	Continued financial support from central office maintained structure. Ultimately it created pressure to change.		High principal turnover kept BLT at beginnings; they never got to meaningful change.
Demographic Shifts	Retirement of old staff, hire of new staff, new pro-shared decision principal, ample training created a new model for shared decision making a success.			
Physical Arrangements				
Local, State & Federal Policy		Local procedures kept BLT structure in place throughout the district.		The routine sharing session was a constant reminder of the teams ineffectiveness. State mandated school improvement increased the pressure for the team to produce.

Table 7.--Major Cultural Influences on Building Leadership Team W-5

Cultural Context	Purpose	Structure	Operation	Impact
Attitudes/ Beliefs	Staff did not view themselves as decision makers; they thought that was principal's job. The purpose of BLT became bringing problems to the principal to solve. First 3 principals more concerned with personal agenda than student agenda.			<p>Cumulative effect of poor climate provided a common agenda for improvement with fourth principal.</p> <p>First principal's motives to participate in TISA set the team on wrong course</p>
Norms	Principal as decision maker was a barrier to buying into concept of shared decision making. Norms of isolation developed preventing open communication.	Past practice maintained structure.	Norms of isolation and conflict altered the content for the team's agenda.	Low risk staff and first principal interfered with planning, decision making and accountability. Team had no impact on improvement. The cumulative historical norms of low impact increased the difficulty of achieving goals.
Relationships	<p>Several strong personalities among staff maintained status quo and school norms. Three principals were a poor match with staff needs.</p> <p>Low trust--teacher to administration.</p> <p>Low respect and trust--teacher to teacher.</p>		<p>Cliques within staff impaired BLT operation. Operational norms fluctuated with team composition and personal agendas.</p>	Poor staff relations paralyzed positive impact and began to erode relationship with students.

teachers as decision-makers and sharing in the leadership of the school was a quantum step for both teachers and principal. The norms and past practice, coupled with poor preparation and readiness, acted as a barrier to teachers accepting the new concept and role.

Another highly influential factor that affected the success of the team was the frequent turnover of principals and the obvious lack of staff development or training provided them. While the district meticulously provided resources for the teams to meet, created schedules and took time from the student's day, they grossly overlooked the need to inform and prepare incoming principals about the teams; their purpose, their operation and structure. It is curious why, with so important an agenda at hand, the central office left it up to the building leadership team to convey these important elements to the new principals. The frequent turnover of principals coupled with their lack of training contributed to the W-5 team becoming stuck in start-up activity. With each new principal the team repeated the same activities, such as writing the mission, over and over. The repetition and pointlessness of these experiences was the source of much frustration and negative thinking.

One set of negative circumstances oddly enough, had a positive effect on W-5 over the long term. The long-established financial commitment to support the teams,

coupled with the success and high visibility recognition of some of the other teams in the district, over time became a source of embarrassment for the superintendent and the W-5 team. The embarrassment was added incentive for the superintendent to take action and motivation for staff members to reflect on their behavior and ultimately change. Had support been withdrawn, the crisis in W-5 might never have happened and the school might have continued on its course of mediocrity.

Given the existing conditions within which school W-5 became involved in TISA, it is little surprise that the building leadership team was so unsuccessful. The major demise of the team began with the first principal who decided to participate in TISA building leadership team preparation without full understanding and endorsement of the staff. School norms and teachers' beliefs that decision making was the job of the principal, coupled with the principal's lack of collaborative leadership skills sealed the fate of W-5's leadership team long before the frequent turnover of principals began. The signs were there for the principal to read and deal with, but he ignored them and the consequence was the team never took root.

This case exemplifies how contextual variables co-mingle and produce outcomes unique to each setting. Had there been a different leader, or had the team deferred participation in the training to work on readiness skills

for example, the W-5 team's outcome might have been profoundly different than it was.

### Case Study W-1

#### The School and Its Community

Located in the center of the school district, school W-1 serves a predominantly Hispanic and Caucasian population of students with a very small representation of Black and Asian students. It was nestled on a side street amidst rows of small frame houses in a low-middle income neighborhood which also supported a major apartment complex and one other smaller apartment complex. The school also served students who were bussed from other areas of the community. Of the 52 percent Hispanic surname population in attendance at the school, about 30 percent were monolingual, Spanish-speaking students who had started to speak some English. This condition added several self-contained bilingual classes to the school.

The grounds of the school were nicely tended and older children had access to playground equipment and playing fields behind the school while a small playground, adjacent to the school, was reserved for primary youngsters. Ample parking to the rear of the school was shared with the park district which sustained a park and baseball field. The building exterior and surroundings was clean and void of graffiti or vandalism.

The school had experienced tremendous growth over the past ten years expanding from a population of about 180 students to 635 most recently; however, the ethnic composition and distribution of Hispanic and Caucasian had remained about the same. The physical plant received a major addition in the late 1980s more than doubling the size of the original building.

The interior of the school was bright, extremely clean and orderly. The work of its preschool to sixth grade students was proudly displayed in the halls and classrooms. Photos of students having recently received achievement recognition were located outside the school office near the front entrance. Students and staff were friendly and helpful to newcomers and students were well behaved and respectful.

The school was staffed with 28 full-time classroom teachers, 14 teacher assistants and a variety part-time specialists, inclusion aides, clerks and other people who supported the staff. Staff recently identified several core values about teaching and learning which influenced their long-range planning and much of their behavior. First, W-1 was a student centered environment which emanated from a widely-shared belief that all children are learners, regardless of the unique challenges they may face. Staff also placed high value on the concept of the school as a community within a community, where there is a mutual

respect for adults and children. Another central and important value was that learning should be authentic and realistic and finally, that it was important that the school be clean and orderly with well-disciplined students.

The community had remained relatively stable throughout the years sustaining about a 25 percent mobility rate. Some of the Hispanic families had been in the country for a number of years with a small minority of the students from third generation families. Most of the students had grandparents or parents who came from Mexico and some parents and students were born in the United States. Interestingly enough, the greatest mobility came from the houses rather than the apartment complexes and the principal attributed it to some upward mobility. A common practice was for multiple families to inhabit the small houses and as they became crowded and economics improved, some of the family members moved to other accommodations.

The school had sustained positive working relationships throughout the years with parents and expressed no particular concerns over staff-community relationships. The principal, however, recognized the need for continual work in this area, and addressed issues that arose in much the same manner as she would school issues, quickly and directly.

### The Principal

At the time of this study, the principal was completing her eleventh year at W-1 school and had been a principal for a total of 14 years. For 2 of her 11 years in the district she served a dual role as principal at W-1 and curriculum director in the district office. Prior to her experience as an administrator she taught for 7 years in elementary and preschool public and private settings. Her professional preparation included a bachelor's degree, masters degree and coursework toward her doctorate. The manner in which she remained informed of educational issues, trends and research was by reading a variety of administrative and teacher journals on a regular basis, attending and presenting at workshops, and engaging in collaborative activities with colleagues and other professionals. Being very much a people person, she claimed to benefit tremendously from her collaborative relationships and valued them highly. Her notion of collaboration was broadly defined but in part consisted of a variety of strategies and processes that involved the staff in researching, discussing and planning the use of new ideas and educational developments that would improve the operation of the school and positively impact student learning.

The principal described her style of leadership as visionary, collaborative and empowering. As a visionary she



believed "it truly is my role to go out and look to the future and [decide what] we want it to look like at W-1 school." She, along with others hoped to challenge the staff with such ideas and to explore them collaboratively. She believed she spent much of her time as a leader encouraging and empowering staff to think and make intelligent professional decisions about student learning. Educationally, she valued highly the acquisition of knowledge through continuous learning, empowering people to make decisions and professional contributions, and good planning.

Though her leadership style was clearly people-centered and collaborative, she established clear demarcation between staff and principal responsibility and accountability, and operated within those parameters.

I don't have any trouble with the fact that I AM the principal and I DO make it clear to people that the buck stops on my desk and that what happens good in this building I DO get credit for and what happens bad in this building I DO get consequence for. But when we talk about the credit, I give it to the teachers. . . . I give the credit to the teachers and I know that if I hadn't hired them, if I hadn't helped to bring out the best in them, if I hadn't created a collaborative environment in the building, they wouldn't shine as they do; but they DO shine. And I think there are other people as good as they are in other places that don't shine and don't meet kids' needs as well, because of the system.

The principal believed one of her most important functions was hiring and sustaining quality staff which included the removal of those staff who did not meet the required standard as indicated in her statement, "if someone really

doesn't know how to teach [to] an objective and they just don't belong here and they don't care about kids, they're gone." Staff awareness of the principal's value of this function is clearly reflected in the statement, "There have been some [people] who don't quite fit, but they're not here anymore." The principal's description of her leadership style, visionary, empowering, and collaborative, was validated by teachers who were interviewed for this study.

BLT chairs the staff meetings; regular monthly staff meetings. Empowerment is the rationale--it's the staff's meeting not the principal's meeting. The principal has a lot of input but so does the BLT and so does the staff member. Any individual staff member comes to the BLT member to get something on the agenda.

The team and staff are not afraid to raise issues; it comes from the leadership. The principal shows people that they are safe when they voice what they really feel and they are valued and that we need to be open like that. I think that comes from her and it has to.

That was one of the things I appreciated on this building leadership team was that the principal was a member of the team, not the boss of the team. Yes, she did bring in a lot of subjects and things that we worked on, but otherwise she was just a member, working collaboratively with all the rest of us to come up with whatever we came up with.

According to staff the W-1 principal played a very central role in the success of the team, in part, because her personal beliefs and characteristics were so highly aligned with the purpose, philosophy, content and design of the TISA program. Her early recognition of this compatibility motivated her to arrange for the training to be brought to the district after having learned about the

program. The impact of that training was described in the story of the W-1 BLT.

### The Story of the W-1 BLT

A result of the TISA training was that ten years ago the W-1 school adopted a shared decision-making model that became a viable, well integrated, highly productive structure for school improvement, while some schools within the same school district were unable to achieve the level of success found at W-1. This story of the W-1 BLT tells how contextual elements influenced the team's development and impact.

W-1 school became involved in TISA through the energetic efforts of the school's principal who was also serving as the district's curriculum coordinator. After learning about TISA from a fellow principal, she arranged for the program trainer to visit the district to describe the program to the district's administrative council, comprised of the central office staff and building administrators. The awareness session provided a very thorough description of TISA, the role of the building leadership teams, and the benefits and liabilities of the program. The district decided to participate in the program and training was conducted. At the conclusion of the training the TISA developer/trainer was hired as the district's first full-time curriculum coordinator.

The combination of these events created tremendously positive energy in the district and the building leadership teams' school improvement efforts became a major focal point. The W-1 team benefited from having the full attention of their principal and the support from central office, which was positive and substantial.

#### The Early Days of the Team

Conditions shortly after implementation proved to be extremely beneficial to the W-1 team. The principal was thoroughly committed to the TISA building leadership model which fit so well with her philosophy and collaborative leadership style. Having reduced the scope of her responsibilities, the principal had the time, latitude and guidance to work with the fledgling team and establish the fundamentals of the team's purpose, structure, and operation.

Teams were closely supervised during the first year and continued to receive training through district level inservice and institute time which enhanced the tasks they were facing and sustained their motivation. The new curriculum director was a strong team advocate who was committed to the teams' success and established local procedures to insure time for the teams to meet on a regular basis.

The W-1 staff had received excellent preparation for the training from their enthusiastic principal, was

philosophically aligned with TISA core beliefs, and was ready to make use of the basic concepts presented during the TISA training as well as specific shared decision-making strategies and team building activities. They were very open to change and as a staff very committed to the belief that all children can learn. They also believed it was their responsibility that all children were learning. The staff got along well with one another, primarily because they respected one another as professionals and prided themselves in being risk-takers and innovators. This view of themselves was a long-standing norm in the school expressed by several of the team members.

We have a building that is willing and eager to think outside the usual bounds, we try not to limit ourselves by some of the structural aspects that might be perceived [as barriers] in other places, and we are not afraid to pilot things.

Sometimes we're seen within the district as these mavericks. There are all these other schools falling in line and then W-1 wants to do something different.

If I feel very strongly about something, I feel safe enough to be able to share that with my colleagues and they will be able to accept that, not that they will agree with it. That's part of W-1 too.

This building is a building full of leaders.

I think W-1 has a cohesiveness that other staffs don't have. Maybe because we've had more responsibility.

If we feel something is necessary as a staff, I think we can get it done.

There were many contextual pluses in this early scenario and the W-5 principal recognized and capitalized on

most of them. A W-5 teacher who was a team member at this time had vivid recollections represented in this statement:

I think the district has bought into the whole idea very well. I wouldn't want to work anywhere else. I think [our] district has been and will continue to be on the cutting edge of a lot of issues and things in education. A lot of that started with TISA in terms of looking at the power teachers should have in terms of decision-making, and giving us that empowerment. You need to have people like the BLT [members] in order to implement that . . . and let us deal with what we think is necessary and best for our situation.

The W-1 team had gotten off to a great start on its path to shared decision-making and school improvement. The principal's increased availability coupled with a high quality training, adequate resources, positive within-school relationships, positive attitudes toward change and staff's strong commitment to student learning were favorable conditions for implementation and those conditions contributed significantly to the initial success of the program.

#### The Team Ten Years Later

The purpose, structure, and operation of the W-1 leadership team has remained very much as proposed in the original training. As described in each W-1 interview, there continued to be four staff members and the principal that comprised the team. Team members continued to be released from class for a half day per month to work and staff are expected to serve a two year term on the team. The team has maintained the procedure of retiring two

members and bringing on two new members each year to insure new thinking as well as maintaining continuity and the principal continues to be a member, not the leader, of the team. The W-1 team's purpose, though stated in slightly different terms from member to member, continued to be one of change agency for school improvement. The team served in a representative capacity of school staff and was compelled to continue to involve them in the decision-making process. Team meetings continued to be open to anyone who wished to attend, and agenda items were generated by anyone in the school with minutes available to everyone in the school. These fundamentals from the original training have been skillfully woven into the fabric of daily life at W-1 and have become fully institutionalized; they are how things are done at W-1 and can be explained by anyone on staff.

Furthermore, the purpose of the team, its accomplishments and these structures are highly valued by all staff and team membership is highly respected and trusted.

I think everyone believes it's [BLT] an important position.

I think it's an important vehicle partly because of the structure of it. You've got the time for the core group to sit down and process through this and help make the other processing with the other staff hopefully more effective.

If there wasn't the BLT, which is the core of the building, to sort of understand and receive those messages, then we wouldn't do very well.

The successful adoption of these program elements was due to the compatibility between the conditions and ideology

of the school and the availability and design of the training. Interestingly, the building leadership team was successful, in part because of the existing conditions in the culture, yet when asked whether the existing culture would have been achieved without the building leadership team, the principal's reply was

In this district, I don't think so. Interestingly enough, I think I was achieving it in my previous school because the environment in the whole district was different. With the district here, I don't think I could have achieved it as well because of those road blocks.

Although the team internalized many core elements of the original training, they added to their effectiveness by developing new processes and routines that enhanced the quality of their work and impact. Basic operational procedures were designed, became well established over the years and took on the appearance of the school improvement planning process and consisted of assessing needs, setting goals, identifying resources and planning implementations and evaluating progress. Staff input was designed into every step of the process as described most aptly by one current team member:

The team's purpose is to work collaboratively with the building to identify problems, come with solutions, present them to the staff, collaboratively work through them, then take the ideas from the staff, go back and make final decisions and present them. The good thing about it is it's never, this is what we've [BLT] decided here.

The timing of these steps coincided with the development of district goals and budget procedures. The close monitoring



of district goals and budget development was a strategy that afforded the principal the opportunity to frame and present school goals to central office in a palatable manner.

A new role for the W-1 building leadership team grew from the perceived need for increased communication between the staff and the team. Consequently, team members began preparing and operating the monthly staff meetings. This operational practice fit well with the principal's belief that staff members should have the opportunity to have a more active role in the monthly meetings because the meetings were actually their meetings.

Other communication from team to staff was facilitated by the formalization of an informal process referred to as the grapevine. Typically, meetings of any kind generated increased discussion throughout the teacher ranks and the team capitalized on this natural communication system by assigning team members to communicate regularly with certain staff members. This system fostered discussion on a regular basis about the team's work and activities and also tapped the concerns of the staff. Since the various grade level teachers and specialists were represented on the BLT, the discussions clustered around like concerns and issues. This created strong bonds between staff members and fostered increased professional discussion.

The effort of the W-1 team generated many positive changes for the school and addressed a wide range of

concerns. The team's broadly defined purpose provided the latitude to address a variety of concerns and explore new ideas that affect student learning. This defined purpose led them, for example, to develop new curriculum, address personnel issues of a selected nature, design implementation of state and district mandates, provide staff development for awareness and skill development, provide a computer lab in the learning center, establish parent programs, write grants, establish research sub-committees, establish three year improvement plans, lead the development of the mission statement and many other successful accomplishments. There was strong consensus about the importance and value of the work of the building leadership team. Its impact was perceived by all interviewees as significant, substantial and high quality.

The concept of the BLT has had a very big affect district-wide. I'm surprised because I see how good it has been and the change it has been able to effect in the district and the other things that have gone on because of the BLT, the site-based management, the people feeling like they have more empowerment. I think it's had a very big affect.

The W-1 building leadership team has not only skillfully and successfully implemented the fundamental framework of the TISA training, it has maintained it for ten years. There are several explanations for this success, one being the principal's leadership. There was wide consensus among the staff that the culture of the school contributed in many positive ways to the success of the leadership team

and the team, in turn, contributed to the positive culture. There was also widespread recognition that the principal was pivotal in sustaining the symbiosis between the team and the culture by modeling the behavior desired from the staff.

I think that comes from the principal's leadership. She's a risk-taker. She's fostering that, I think, in the team and the staff. Let's take those risks, were there to educate those kids, let's do it the very best way we can.

Interviews also revealed a strong consensus that the superintendent often served as a major barrier to the team's effectiveness. The major issue involved poor and confusing communication coupled with contradictory behavior which severely undercut the team's efforts. "Well, let me tell you, when I first was hired here, I was told to change things so that kids could be successful, but don't change anything." The tension generated from these perceptions was substantial and the interviewees perceived the principal's and superintendent's leadership styles as particularly conflicting. "The principal's style is at loggerheads with the superintendent--they are so different in style that they even have trouble communicating because they don't think the same way at all." The principal noted she had developed mind-sets and strategies over the years enabling her to work around the conflict and reduce frustration. She built a support system for herself through affiliations with other school administrators and would "share whatever we were doing in our buildings, share concerns, positives and

negatives; if something was roadblocking us, we would plan how we were going to go into the next administrative council meeting." She also saw her role as protecting the autonomy of the school, and the focus and direction the staff had chosen. She would often minimize the significance of some issues generated from central office and give full emphasis to others, depending which would be most beneficial to the school.

I have no difficulty making a decision and having my hand slapped if that must happen. But as long as it's for the good of the kids and it isn't going to do anything to contradict district policy or known procedures, I don't see that as a problem.

Another manner in which the principal confronted contextual limitations was through the acquisition of resources. District norms maintained the practice of equalizing district resources between the schools. They experienced this practice as a limitation and interference of creativity and problem solving. They also experienced the equalization as unfair, since it was not always equitable that the schools did not all share the same socioeconomic support. The principal's response to this contextual limitation was to develop grant writing capabilities within the school. She did this by writing numerous grants to support efforts the team perceived as valuable. Because the effort was grant supported it was permitted.

A barrier noted by several staff was the increased size of the school and additional staff. The principal, however, saw this as a plus because it allowed her to "bring in the kind of influences that I wanted. I am responsible for about 90 percent of the staff here today, only three or four of the original staff remain."

Though there were numerous examples of the principal's productive responses to contextual barriers, the final one noted here related to her role as buffer between mandates and staff. The principal's first response to mandates was to learn about them and determine which parts would serve the needs of the school. In some cases, the mandates were portrayed as endorsement of the quality work in progress at the school and in other instances it was used to capture the staff's attention and motivate them to move in a particular direction. Whatever the chosen direction, mandates were analyzed for their benefit to the mission of the school. They were given prominence or minimal attention on the basis of value to the school efforts rather than on the basis of their origin. This provided a consistent focus for staff and conserved their energy to achieve their goals without losing momentum to distracting mandates.

Chapter II indicates that the principal is a significant factor in the context of the school while also having to address issues created from the context. That paradox raises questions about the significance that

character, self-reflection and integrity play in a principal's ability to be effective. Principal W-1 experienced the conflict generated from that paradox and after much painful reflection, found her answer. As she described her belief in herself as a leader, able to confront issues, able to take risks, able to be honest and truthful, she came upon a very sad and painful moment in her career which she would never forget. It changed her forever.

. . . but I can't be angry with him because it was I who did it. It still brings tears . . . when I sacrificed my integrity, I did things he told me to do because he was the boss and he told me to do it, but I knew it was wrong, I did it anyhow. I hated myself, I felt just miserable. So, because of that I can't ever go back on being truthful, . . . I try to be as gentle as I can when I'm being truthful and giving bad news, but I try not to beat around the bush and try to be direct. . . . I think I learned a really good lesson--I will never do some things I might be tempted to do. I will never sacrifice my integrity in any way. That's it.

Coming to terms with herself led to the peace and resolution of the long-term conflict between her and the superintendent. It was the resolution of the long-standing conflict that permitted greater productivity in the school.

### Analysis of Influencing Factors

The W-1 team certainly faced numerous challenges throughout the years which could have sealed its fate; the state reform efforts, strained relations between the principal and the superintendent, inadequate funding, a challenging student population, frequent turnover of central

office staff, increased numbers of students to name a few. However, the team endured and even blossomed, in spite of the potentially limiting effects of these contextual conditions.

Several major factors were significant in the success of the W-1 building leadership team; an existing school culture that was compatible with the goals and ideology of the TISA training, a principal who had the skills and willingness to confront contextual barriers as they arose, and a quality training. The major ecological and cultural influences are listed in Table 8 and Table 9.

The training was the answer to the principal's vision of collaboration and was the vehicle through which she would foster increased cohesiveness and create a school culture conducive to change. It provided strategies, conceptual frameworks, and shared decision-making processes that were successfully implemented and over a ten year period continued to be highly valued operational procedures and tools for the team. The compatibility between the training and the W-5 team was evident in the team's adoption and maintenance of the purpose, structure, and operation guidelines prescribed during the training.

Prominent features of the school culture were represented by the collective beliefs that children can learn and teachers are responsible to help them learn. The

Table 8.--Major Ecological Influences on Building Leadership Team W-1

Ecological Context	Purpose	Structure	Operation	Impact
Resources	New curriculum director focused all available resources for teams to meet and establish their purpose.	Central office provided release time for teams to meet regularly. This was highly valued by the team and essential to their success.	The available time plus ongoing in-service and training gave clear direction about the type of work teams should be doing.	Equalization of resources by Superintendent limited the team's impact. Principals grant writing efforts allowed staff to achieve their goals.
Demographic Shifts				
Physical Arrangements			Increased size increased complexity of operations but not the quality.	
Local, State & Federal Policy	State reform mandates were used as leverage and endorsement for local BLT mission.	District support for BLT time to meet provided stability.		District-imposed change tactics conflicted with school planning and threatened the quality of the programs.



Table 9.--Major Cultural Influences on Building Leadership Team W-1

Cultural Context	Purpose	Structure	Operation	Impact
Attitudes/ Beliefs	Preexisting beliefs and attitudes were highly compatible with purpose espoused during training. "Students can learn" belief drove purpose.		Belief that anything in school can enhance or impede effectiveness was basis of team activity and tasks.	Staff's "can do" attitude added to success. Ecological factors were seen as problems to solve, not fixed barriers.
Norms	The modeling of risk taking by the principal bolstered staff spirit.	The structure was perceived as successful--no need to alter.	Principal provided training every year for new team.	Staff who did not fit the culture were eliminated. This increased pride and respect among staff and increased productivity.
Relationships	Principal modeled fairness, respect which encouraged that behavior in staff.		Principal modeled fairness, respect and risk-taking which encouraged participation for BLT activities.	Superintendent perceived as a barrier. Principal's reaction to superintendent perceived as a positive force for change.

staff and principal's positive attitude toward continuous learning, change and collaboration provided a strong backdrop for developing and testing new ideas. Supportive attitudes toward innovation reduced the risks related to change and in turn encouraged more risk taking and innovation. The long path of mostly positive, mostly successful experiences with innovation stimulated more activity of that kind and over time, norms that expected such behavior emerged.

The long-term, eleven year tenure of the principal provided stability and support for staff. Long-term projects could be developed without fear of interruption or abandonment. The team became the vehicle through which the principal developed and refined collaborative skills, built individual strength through empowerment and nurtured the vision of excellence. The practice of rotating team membership yearly provided continuity and innovation for the team and enabled the principal to help staff grow professionally through a highly personal, long-term experience. As team members returned to the ranks, they took with them the newly acquired skills and applied them within the culture. In this way the principal was able to shape and influence the culture to one of leadership, collaboration, and innovation. The modeling of risk-taking, collaboration, shared-decision making, honesty and belief in student learning by the principal served as a model for

staff, and over time became the norm for and behavior expected of staff. Newcomers either fit or were no longer on staff.

The principal's constant focus on the cultural aspects of the context and quick handling of the ecological roadblocks acted as a shield for the staff, permitting them to use their energy for students, problem solving and teaching.

#### General Assertions About Contextual Influence in Case Schools

The two schools in this study were similar in many ways; the populations served were primarily Caucasian and Hispanic, the schools had similar total enrollments, attendance patterns were nearly identical, they were located in the same area of the district, they received close to equal resources from the central office, both perceived barriers from central office, both were subject to high turnover in central office staff, and they both participated in the same training for building leadership teams. In spite of the similarities between the schools, the impact and effectiveness of the leadership teams was profoundly different.

The literature in Chapter III suggested that contextual variables comingle to produce very different outcomes from school to school. That assertion appeared to have relevance for the two case schools in this study.

However, the literature in Chapter III failed to describe how the comingling of variables produced varied results, which was the focus of this study.

Because both of the schools in this study were from the same school district, they had many contextual factors in common that related to the work of the building leadership teams. Most of those common elements were ecological and are listed in Table 10. While the schools experienced common ecological conditions, the impact of these factors on each school's leadership teams varied, based on the school's response to them. The ways in which the schools responded were affected greatly by their cultural contexts listed in Table 11 and the school's leadership, listed in Table 12. For example, both schools experienced the frequent turnover of central office staff. In W-5 this had significant impact on the building leadership team while in W-1 it had close to none. The cultural conditions in W-5 combined with a lack of stable or effective leadership contributed to the continued difficulty the team experienced with the ecological challenges that appeared throughout the years. The pattern established in these case schools clearly linked the degree of team impact and effectiveness moreso with the culture and leadership of the school than with the individual or combined effects of ecological factors.

Table 10.--Responses of W-1 and W-5 to Commonly Experienced Ecological Elements

W-1 Response	Ecological Elements	W-5 Response
BLT found grants and other means to accomplish goals.	Equalized resources among district schools	Expressed hopelessness. Used as excuse for limited productivity.
Accepted differences as the work to be done--a challenge.	Demographics	Perceived clientele as more demanding and challenging than other district schools.
Made new alliances or avoided contact. Strong school culture permitted team to proceed with own agenda.	Frequent turnover at central office	Frequently referenced as a problem. Lack of school purpose increased reliance on central office.
Staff perceived greater complexity, affect on communication. Principal saw as benefit--opportunity to hire talent.	Increased enrollments and staff	Early student growth added to the complexity of problems. Later addition of new staff valued for fresh new ideas.
Perceived as valuable, essential to success. Conveyed district support.	Release time for teams to meet	Increased frustration perhaps to a point of changing for better.
Close match with core beliefs--served as basis for purpose, structure and operation.	Participation in TISA	Motives for participation conflicted with values, purpose etc. of training. Team never established its purpose.
Was used as endorsement of team's effectiveness or leverage to address concerns.	State mandates	Became distractions and limitations to team effectiveness.

Table 11.--Responses of W-1 and W-5 to Significant Cultural Elements

W-1 Response	Cultural Elements	W-5 Response
Student learning was the focus of school, respect, all can learn. High accountability for student learning.	Attitudes and beliefs toward students	Some can learn. Low accountability for student learning.
Staff was not afraid of change, want to plan it--dislike imposed change. Support and enjoy decision making.	Attitudes and beliefs toward change and decision making	Early staff felt imposed on to make decisions, fearful of change. Recent staff more open to change.
School focused, eager for new ideas reflective.	Attitudes and beliefs toward continuous growth	Marginal interest, classroom focused.
Total support. Highly valued.	Attitudes and beliefs toward BLT	Useless, never understood.
Prided themselves as risk-takers, innovators and change agents.	School norms	Principal was the decision-maker, not teacher.
Respect, support, willing to disagree with one another, collegial, professionals.	Relationships--teacher to teachers	Cliques, back-stabbing, critical about others.
Respect, support collegial, personal, pride.	Relationships--teachers to principal	Varied with principals. #1--Low trust, little respect #2--Felt sorry for her #3--Disdain, low trust #4--Respect, support.
Respect, empowerment, collegiality, support.	Relationships--principal to staff	#1--Appeasement #2--Attempted democracy #3--Control #4--Respect, encouragement, support.
Low trust, low respect. Viewed as control. Recognized support for BLT.	Relationships--school to central office	Low trust, low respect. Viewed as control and self-interest. Recognized support for new decision making model.

Table 11.--Continued

W-1 Response	Cultural Elements	W-5 Response
Developed strategies to buffer staff from interference.	Low trust, relationships between schools and central office.	Administration used as excuse to not try new ideas and not change.
Developed support structure and network with fellow principals, advanced preparation for anticipated changes.	Norms of poor and contradictory communication to schools from central office.	Became confused, withdrawn and frustrated.

Table 12.--Responses of W-1 and W-5 to Significant Leadership Elements

W-1 Response	Leadership Elements	W-5 Response
Same principal from training to study.	Stability	Had 4 principals in 10 years.
School as society, collaboration, empowerment, problem solvers, constant improvement, cutting edge, continuous learners.	Vision	#1-#3--Unclear #4--Shared decision-making
Strong commitment to vision and staff.	Conviction	#1-#3--Marginal #4--Insufficient data
Willing to face criticism, reprimand, and self-evaluation.	Courage	#1-#3--Minimal #4--Insufficient data
"Walks the talk."	Integrity	#1-#3--Little relationship between what was said and what was done. #4--Insufficient data
Strategist, process skills, good listener, resource acquisition.	Knowledge/Skills	#1--Poor collaborative skills #2--Poor confrontation skills #3--Poor team building skills #4--Good listener



The major contextual influences on the purpose, structure, operation and impact of the W-1 and W-5 building leadership teams appear to be primarily attributed to the cultural and leadership conditions in the schools rather than the ecological conditions.

While Chapter V focused on the presentation and analysis of the data from schools W-1 and W-5, the next chapter describes the findings of the study, implications for school leaders and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER VI

### FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of a brief review of the purpose and methodology of the study, the findings of the study, the implications of the findings for administrators, and recommendations for further research.

#### The Purpose of the Study and Its Methodology

The impetus for this study came from the fact that change has become increasingly more prominent in education since the late 1950s and though our understanding about what constitutes effective change has grown, questions still remain about why it works in some situations and not others. Although context has been attributed with having an impact on change efforts; it is not fully understood how it works to yield enhancing or limiting effects.

In the early 1980s a program was designed to train building leadership teams to be change agents. The teams addressed the ongoing needs of the school and planned and implemented change for the purpose of increasing student achievement. The program was called Training to Increase Student Achievement, otherwise known as TISA. Large numbers of teams throughout the Midwest United States were trained

in this shared-decision making method and many schools internalized the process and sustained the operation of the teams for more than a decade. Others were unable to make effective use of it even in the earliest stages.

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze how the ecological and cultural dimensions of organizational context influenced the purpose, structure, operation, and impact of two building leadership teams from two elementary schools within a suburban Chicago, Illinois school district. Although both teams participated in TISA one team experienced success while the other did not. This study focused on how organizational context influenced this result.

Based on the results of a questionnaire to schools in the suburban Chicago, Illinois area with active building leadership teams, two schools from within the same school district were selected to be case study schools. One school was identified as having a high impact team while the other school was identified as having a low impact school. A variety of data were collected about the schools and the school district with the main source of data coming from interviews with teachers and the school principal. The interviews were to provide staff perceptions of how contextual elements contributed to the teams high or low impact. All formal interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed, allowing the researcher to code responses. The

data were reported in narrative form as two separate illustrations of contextual influence. Particular attention was given to the ecological and cultural dimensions of organizational context. A brief comparative discussion of the two sites concluded the analysis.

### Summary of Findings

Although both schools in this study were subjected to the same district context, participated in the same preparatory training for building leadership teams, and served well-matched clientele, the impact of each school's team on school improvement differed significantly. The leadership team at W-1 was described as responsible for major programmatic changes directly and positively impacting student learning while the W-5 leadership team was attributed with no such changes. This study sought to understand how school context influenced the varied outcomes between the two schools.

There were three major findings from this study. The first finding was that both schools in the study identified certain ecological dimensions of context as barriers to school improvement efforts; however, only the low-impact team school felt disempowered by the barriers. The ecological dimensions of context were described in the literature as the non-human conditions such as resources, demographics, physical conditions, and policy. The ecological elements identified by case study schools along

with each school's response to them are listed in Table 10 (Chapter V) and consisted mainly of equalization of resources, demographics, a high rate central office turnover, increased enrollments and staff, release time to meet, participation in the TISA training, and state mandates. The response to the ecological barriers, rather than the barriers themselves was the determining factor in the school's success or failure in dealing with the ecological conditions. School W-1 viewed such conditions as challenges and devised creative responses to them, while W-5 described them as impossible barriers that prevented them from taking action.

The culture of the school combined with the character traits and skills of the principal appeared to be major factors influencing the chosen response to ecological conditions. School W-1's culture was best represented with norms of collegiality, positive attitudes toward change and continued learning, strong commitment to and belief in student learning, norms of risk-taking and problem solving, respect for student, staff and school administration and high value of the building leadership team. The principal in W-1 was perceived as being a visionary, risk-taker, valuing collaboration and empowerment, seen as a member of the team, not the boss and identified as critical to the successful implementation of the building leadership team.

The principal's philosophy was closely aligned with the goals and core values of the TISA training.

Contrastingly, W-5's culture was described as having highly competitive cliques among staff, low trust and low respect among staff and with the school administration, norms that describe the teacher as teacher, not decision-maker, fear of change, marginal interest in professional growth and low value of building leadership team. Leadership in W-5 consisted of four principals in ten years, three of which had limited interest or ability to confront the cultural conditions and establish a vision for the school and purpose for the team.

The second major finding of this study was that the culture of each school was the result of intended actions meant to achieve certain goals. School leaders either took or avoided action based on their personal character and skill. In School W-1, for example, the principal exercised her authority and power to eliminate staff that "did not fit" and replace them with those who could support the core values of the school as a means to achieve the vision she held for the school. The composition of the staff determined the attitudes and beliefs, types of relationships, levels of trust and resulting school wide norms. In comparison, School W-5's first three leaders were unsuccessful at eliminating or altering the staff configuration and were unable to alter the attitudes and

beliefs, relationships, trust levels and school norms. The action or inaction taken by leadership contributed to the resulting cultures; one supporting change the other limiting it.

The final major finding was that the principal, as both element in and shaper of the context, was a key component of the team's level of success. The leadership elements exerted influence both directly and indirectly on the teams' efforts and were described in Table 12 (Chapter V) as stability, vision, conviction, courage, integrity, and knowledge and skills. The direct influence of the principal was based on the contributions they made as a member of the team by sharing expertise, ideas, knowledge and skills with other team members, while the indirect influence consisted of addressing contextual issues that might threaten the team's efforts. The principal's ability to recognize and confront contextual issues, including those where the principal was the contextual issue, required character of the highest order. It was situations of this nature that discriminated most dramatically between Schools W-1 and W-5.

### Implications

Implications of these findings suggest that the ecological and cultural elements of context exert tremendous influence on aspects of school life, in this case, the efforts of the building leadership teams. School leaders should be acutely aware of the contextual variables

influencing their schools and the types of influence they exert. Learning to read the contextual signs is the first important skill administrators need to cultivate, because the contextual elements are numerous and vary from setting.

It is important to recognize that contexts can change quickly and have significant impact on the desired outcomes of proposed changes. Much like a snowflake, context is intricate, complex and can change rapidly. Interestingly, even long-standing norms, thought to be most resistant to change can be altered rapidly with the strategic alteration of the contextual tapestry. The addition of one particular student for example, can alter the classroom and school conditions in a matter of days. All the contextual factors related to proposed changes must be carefully analyzed and if addressed, can make the difference in school change efforts.

Addressing contextual conditions is essential. The more successful administrators not only recognize potential barriers, but address them with well thought out plans. Administrators must recognize that contexts for change must be created which may require delaying certain action. If a school lacks a receptive context for change proceeding with implementation may destroy the entire effort.

The assessment and response to contextual issues is ongoing throughout change efforts. As schools move through the process of change new contexts develop which may



influence the outcomes. Effective change agents continually assess the contextual horizon for emerging issues and trends, recognizing that ecological elements are often easier to address than are the cultural elements.

Administrators should avoid quick fix responses to potential problems. It is unknown for example, whether the successful configuration created in W-1 would have resulted in W-5 with the mere transfer of the principal. We often would like the comfort of such simple solutions. However, the principal is not only the creator of the context, but is also a significant part of the context. Therefore, to suggest that principals who are successful in one contextual setting will be successful in all contextual settings is short-sighted at best. A more productive course of action for leaders would be to cultivate and refine the skills for reading and understanding contexts and developing the personal character that is needed to confront them.

The early actions of administrators taken or not taken to address contextual issues in new settings may determine the fate of attempted change efforts. Often, projects are doomed in the earliest moments of existence.

### Recommendations for Further Research

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations for further study are suggested:

1. Further exploration is needed of how context exerts influence on change efforts. The role it plays at

the district level, between district and school and within larger, more complex school settings needs further investigation.

2. The leadership skills and character traits that enhance or impede effective contextual analysis and responsiveness is essential to comprehending this powerful factor of the change process.

3. The paradox of principal as creator of the context and major factor in the context needs further exploration.

4. The early actions of successful administrators needs to be examined. What contextual issues do they identify that need to be addressed in the new setting and how do they address them.

5. The issue of whether administrative effectiveness is context bound or indeed transportable is worthy of much attention. If such research could generate insight for what administrators should look for when considering new positions or conversely, what to look for when hiring administrators, perhaps many mismatches could be avoided.

## APPENDIX A-1

Date

Dear

I am in the dissertation phase of my doctoral studies at Loyola University, Chicago and am requesting your district's participation in my research. The study attempts to determine the influence of school context on the purpose, structure, operation and impact of building leadership teams at the elementary level. To make these determinations, two schools will be studied using site visits, interviews and document reviews. The use of the case study method will lead to the identification and understanding of the contextual configurations which enhance or inhibit change efforts of school-based leadership teams.

The two case study schools will be identified and invited to participate based on the results of a short survey which will go to the principal and two teachers from each of thirty-three elementary schools in four suburban Chicago school districts. The survey, which should take no more than thirty minutes to complete, is meant to obtain perceptions about team operation and impact. Following tabulation of the survey, schools will be contacted for case study participation and may choose to decline participation. The time commitment for case study schools will involve no more than four days of visits and interviews with the specific schedule for such activity being arranged between the researcher and the principal. At no time throughout the study or in the writing of the dissertation will the names of districts, schools or individuals be used. Complete anonymity is guaranteed and all data will be coded and kept strictly confidential. Participation is completely voluntary and participants may withdraw involvement at any time during the study.

It is anticipated that surveys will be sent to schools on March 18, 1994 and returned by March 25, 1994. Initial contact with possible case study schools will be made in early April with site visits occurring during mid to late April. Results of the study will be made available upon request.

To indicate your district's willingness to participate in this study please copy the attached letter on your district stationery and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. I sincerely appreciate your consideration regarding participation in this study and I will look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Aurora M. Chase

(Date)

The Chair  
IRB c/o Research Services  
6525 N. Sheridan Road  
Chicago, IL 60626

Dear Chair:

Aurora M. Chase, a doctoral candidate at Loyola University, Chicago has reviewed the details of her doctoral research project with me.

I am supportive and see the value of this study for teachers and principals. Therefore, I am giving permission for Aurora M. Chase to conduct the study in our school district.

Sincerely,

Name  
Title

March 20,1994

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to complete the attached questionnaire. It is an important step in my dissertation process and serves as the basis for the next phase of study. It should not take more than fifteen minutes to complete.

The questions refer to "Building Leadership Teams" which were established in your district's schools during the 1980's. Since the time when these teams were first implemented, your school may have decided to give your BLT a new name, such as school improvement team or school leadership team. Should you need clarification about the team in reference, please ask your principal. For purposes of continuity, the teams are referred to as "BLT's" in this questionnaire.

Once you have completed the survey place it in the attached envelope and mail it to me by Saturday, March 26,1994. Please feel free to call me at 584-6621 should you have questions or need additional information. Again, thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Aurora M. Chase

Dear Principal,

I am in the dissertation phase of my doctoral studies at Loyola University Chicago and have received permission from your superintendent to invite you to participate in my research. This questionnaire represents the first phase of my study and requires that you and two of your staff complete it and return it to me by the end of the week. It should not take more than fifteen minutes to complete.

The questions refer to "Building Leadership Teams" which were established in your district's schools during the 1980's. Since the time when these teams were first implemented, your school may have decided to give your BLT a new name, such as school improvement team or school leadership team. Should you need clarification about the team in reference, please ask your superintendent. For purposes of continuity, the teams are referred to as "BLT's" in this questionnaire. Please select a teacher who is currently serving on the team and a second one who is no longer a member of the team, but clearly knows of the team's work to complete the questionnaire.

Once you have completed the survey place it in the attached envelope and mail it to me by Saturday, March 26, 1994. There is no need for teachers to turn their questionnaires in to you; they can place them in the attached envelope and mail them directly to me. Should your school be selected to participate in phase two of the study, I will contact you personally in early April. Please feel free to call me at 584-6621 should you have questions or need additional information. Again, thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Aurora M. Chase

## APPENDIX A-2



## Building Leadership Team Questionnaire

District \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

- I. Please indicate your role by checking one of the following:

Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Team Member \_\_\_\_\_ Non-team teacher \_\_\_\_\_

- II. Please read each statement carefully and indicate your response by circling the number which most accurately represents your perception. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer truthfully. Following each question is a section for comments. Please use this space to explain your answer should you feel the need to do so, or to give examples which more clearly illustrate your answer. Your added narrative will be extremely useful to the study. When you have completed the survey, place it in the accompanying envelope and return it directly to me by March 26, 1994. All responses will remain confidential.

- III.**      To what degree:
- |  |         |          |             |
|--|---------|----------|-------------|
|  | minimal | moderate | substantial |
|--|---------|----------|-------------|

1. does your school's BLT have student learning as the focus of their work

1            2            3            4            5

**comments/examples:**

## 2. has the BLT made improvements

**in school practices?**

1            2            3            4            5

in curriculum?

1            2            3            4            5

in instruction?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**in student learning?**

1            2            3            4            5

**comments/examples:**

**3. has student learning been the reason for making changes**

**in school practices?**

1            2            3            4            5

in curriculum?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

in instruction?

1            2            3            4            5

**comments/examples:**

**4. has the BLT addressed problems stemming from:**

teacher/administrator beliefs?	1	2	3	4	5
teacher/administrator attitudes?	1	2	3	4	5
school norms?	1	2	3	4	5
student learning?	1	2	3	4	5
comments/examples:					

**5. does the BLT do the following:**

stay knowledgeable about current research?	1	2	3	4	5
assess school improvement needs?	1	2	3	4	5
establish long range plans to meet identified school needs?	1	2	3	4	5
involve non-team staff in the planning process?	1	2	3	4	5
create or adopt new programs based on student needs?	1	2	3	4	5
monitor progress of implemented changes?	1	2	3	4	5
evaluate progress of implemented changes?	1	2	3	4	5
comments/examples:					

**6. Is BLT's work:**

related to the needs of students in your school?	1	2	3	4	5
related to the people and norms of your school?	1	2	3	4	5
related to the needs of the district?	1	2	3	4	5
valued by staff?	1	2	3	4	5
comments/examples:					

**7. does the BLT**

have building goals that coincide with district goals?	1	2	3	4	5
have an established structure of participants and tenures?	1	2	3	4	5
have operational guidelines?	1	2	3	4	5
have a clear purpose?	1	2	3	4	5
keep non-team members informed of the team's work?	1	2	3	4	5
assess student progress?	1	2	3	4	5
determine improvement in student learning bases on implemented changes?	1	2	3	4	5
comments/examples:					

## APPENDIX B-1

## Participant Consent Form

I agree to participate in a research study conducted by Aurora M. Chase, a doctoral candidate at Loyola University, Chicago, who is working on her dissertation. This study is about the influence context has on the purpose, structure, operation and impact of the building leadership teams.

I am willing to be interviewed and audio taped in a private session with Ms. Chase to share my perceptions of factors that affect our building leadership team's work. I realize that my name will not be referenced in any way to other interviewees, or in the text of the dissertation and that all my contributions will be kept confidential. There are no physical or emotional risks to be expected from my participation and I stand to gain insights which could improve our team's effectiveness. Questions of a procedural nature will be answered in full and I can choose to refuse or withdraw consent or discontinue participation in the project at any time.

---

Date

Signature of Participant

I have fully explained the purpose and methods of the study described above and such risks as are involved in their performance.

---

Date

Signature of Researcher

## **APPENDIX B-2**

## Interview Questions:

The purpose of the interviews is to determine how the ecological and cultural elements of school context interact to influence the purpose, structure, operation and impact of the BLT's?

Individual interviews to be conducted with:

Principal	1	approximately 60 min
Team members	3	approximately 45 min
Classroom teachers	3	(one from K-1; 2-3; 4-5) 30 min
Specials	2	(one from A/M/PE; and Spec Ed) 30 min

**TOTAL APPROXIMATE TIME REQUIRED = 6-8 hours / school**

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION NEEDED FROM THE PRINCIPAL:

### Biographical Data:

- a. # of years in current position
- b. total # of years as principal
- c. other administrative experiences
- d. years teaching, subjects, grades
- e. educational preparation
- f. means by which keep self informed of educational issues, trends, and research.
- g. Did you participate in the original training for leadership team?
- h. Were you a principal at the time?
- i. Describe your leadership style.
- j. Describe your core educational values.

### Demographic Data:

- a. size of school
- b. # of teachers
- c. # of students
- e. describe the community at large
- f. describe the community your school serves
- g. per pupil expenditure for education
- h. describe the diversity composition of staff and students.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL AND TEAM MEMBERS:

### STRUCTURE:

How many team members are there?

Who comprises the team?

How long is a "term"?

How does one get on the team?

Has it always been structured this way?

In what ways have the following factors affected the structure of the team?

(Ecological)

Resources:

Physical arrangements:

Working conditions:

Scheduling patterns:

School size:

Demographic shifts:

Local policy:

State policy:

(Cultural)

Attitudes/beliefs:

Norms:

Norms promotive of School Improvement

Relationships:

### PURPOSE:

What types of things does your BLT do? (needs assess, planning, curr devel, inst improvement, assess stu perf etc)

What would you describe as your team's primary purpose?

In what ways have the following factors affected the purpose of the team?

(Ecological)

Resources:

Physical arrangements:

Working conditions:



Scheduling patterns:

School size:

Demographic shifts:

Local policy:

State policy:

(Cultural)

Attitudes/beliefs:

Norms:

Norms promotive of School Improvement;

Relationships:

## OPERATION:

Describe how you conduct your work?

How often do you meet, where?

How do you determine what you are going to work on?

How do you keep non-team members informed of/involved in your work?

How do you relate one year's work to the next?

How do you plan and implement change in the school?

In what ways have the following factors affected the operation of the team?

(Ecological)

Resources:

Physical arrangements:

Working conditions:

Scheduling patterns:

School size:

Demographic shifts:

Local policy:

State policy:

**(Cultural)****Attitudes/beliefs:****Norms:****Norms promotive of School Improvement****Relationships:****IMPACT:****How would you describe the impact your team has had on its defined purpose? .....on student learning?****How do you know the team is responsible for such changes?****What impact do you believe the team COULD have and what is standing in the way of achieving it?****In what ways have the following factors affected the impact of the team?****(Ecological)****Resources:****Physical arrangements:****Working conditions:****Scheduling patterns:****School size:****Demographic shifts:****Local policy:****State policy:****(Cultural)****Attitudes/beliefs:****Norms:****Norms promotive of School Improvement****Relationships:**

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## VITA

The author, Aurora Morris-Chase, has served in numerous capacities during her many years in public education. She has been a teacher and principal at the elementary and middle school levels, central office administrator, consultant, trainer and college instructor.

While serving as a consultant for a Title IVc project in Illinois, Ms. Chase developed the Training to Increase Student Achievement (TISA), which was the preparatory training for building leadership teams to plan and implement school improvement efforts. During the 1980s she delivered this training to hundreds of schools throughout the country and established a large consortium of schools in the suburban Chicago, Illinois area.

Her leadership during this period and active involvement in the school improvement movement at the national level contributed to local and state policy and well established shared decision-making structures in schools and school districts.

With the exception of a three year work experience in the Washington, DC area, Ms. Chase has worked and lived in the Chicago area for more than twenty years with her two children, Dana and Conrad.

## DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Aurora Marie Morris-Chase has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 2, 1996

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